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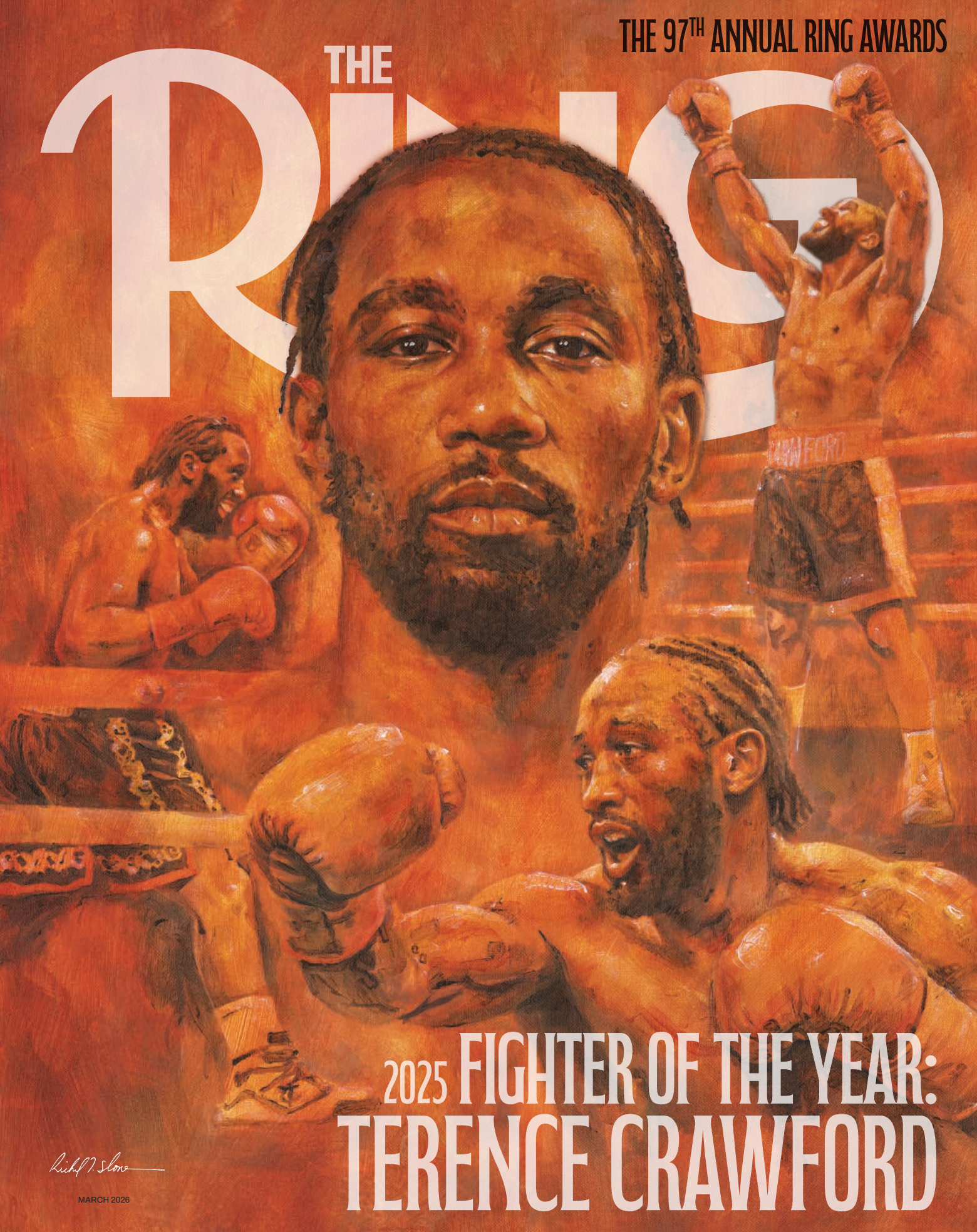

## 2025 FIGHTER OF THE YEAR: TERENCE CRAWFORD

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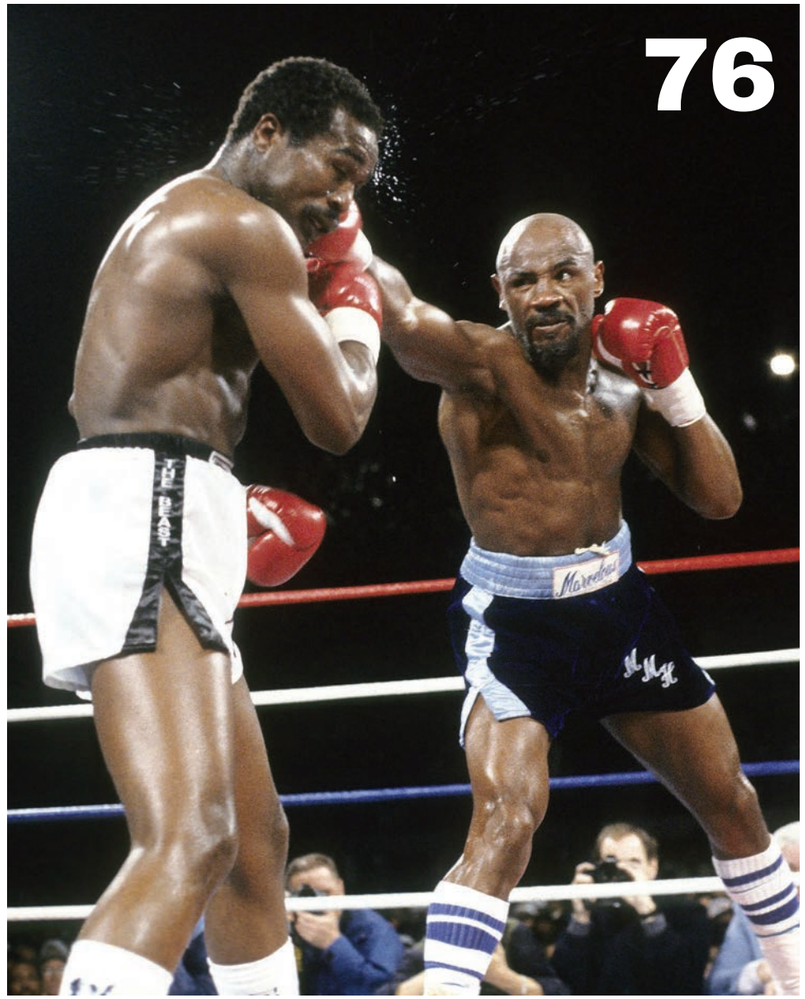


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Focus On Sport

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# How stc group Built the System Beneath the City of Play

Saudi Arabia is no longer emerging on the global sports map. It is there, recognized by fans, marked by presence, and impossible to overlook. In boxing alone, the Kingdom has staged some of the sport's most significant modern bouts, including the undisputed heavyweight championship fight between Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk in Riyadh, a contest that unified every major title and brought global attention to Saudi Arabia as a destination for elite live sport. Beyond the ring, the Kingdom has built an entertainment calendar that signals a new era for the world stage.

What is unfolding now goes deeper than high-profile events. Saudi Arabia is not just hosting. It is engineering the infrastructure that makes global entertainment native to its cities, built to last, scale, and resonate long after the crowds have gone.

Nowhere is this new vision more vivid than in Qiddiya City, which officially opened in December 2025. Rising from the desert forty-five kilometers outside Riyadh, the 360-square-kilometer site is conceived not as a conventional city, but as a destination built entirely around Play Life. It is the first city in the Kingdom dedicated to play, positioned as a national asset and a reflection of Saudi Arabia's evolving identity. At the heart of its first phase is Six Flags Qiddiya City, a theme park boasting twenty-eight attractions, including five world-record rides. Among these is Falcons Flight, presented by stc, the world's tallest, fastest, and longest roller coaster, plunging from 195 meters and reaching speeds of 250 kilometers per hour.

Qiddiya City's significance goes beyond world record-breaking attractions. Engineering a world-class coaster is a visible achievement, but what truly sets the city apart and ultimately determines its success is the ability to welcome and host millions of visitors.

Qididya City and its assets required worldclass infrastructure capable of supporting the operations while remaining invisible to the guest. This is where stc steps in. As the Official Premier Speed Partner of Six Flags Qiddiya City, the group engineered the digital backbone that supports every layer of the digital guest experience. stc's digital infrastructure powers contactless ride access, seamless payments across all platforms, and full integration with Qitaf, stc's loyalty program, allowing guests to redeem points for tickets, purchases, and experiences. The entire ICT environment functions as one seamless environment, built to manage high demand, minimise friction, and keep the experience moving from start to finish.

The work stc delivered at Six Flags Qiddiya City was built as a launch point for something larger. Every component of the system was developed with future expansion in mind, allowing it to serve as a foundational model for Qiddiya City 's long-term infrastructure. The five-year partnership between stc group and Qiddiya Investment Company for the first assets to open, such as Six Flags and Aquarabia Qiddiya City, formalizes this vision, establishing an initial framework where physical construction, operations and digital architecture evolve tandem. The focus is not on scaling a single experience but on defining how large-scale entertainment environments are designed, deployed, and sustained over time.

This vision reflects a broader shift in how entertainment is embedded into Saudi Arabia's long-term trajectory. The Kingdom's arenas are evolving. From Riyadh Season's headline boxing nights to flagship events like the Italian and Spanish Supercups and the Esports World Cup, the country is moving beyond individual spectacles to create full-scale destinations that reshape how live, immersive experiences are imagined and delivered. This includes boxing's evolution within the Kingdom, which has moved beyond one-off headline bouts to structured international competitions, such as the Riyadh Season WBC Boxing Grand Prix - a multi-phase competition bringing together fighters from more than forty countries.

Qiddiya City is not the first move in that direction, but it stands as a major step forward. As more destinations prepare to follow, the systems established through stc's solutions offer more than a technical advantage. They create the conditions for consistency, for growth without disruption, and for experiences that move in step with the Kingdom's vision, setting new global standards for digital enablement, and helping turn a national transformation into everyday reality.

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**SHEFFIELD STEEL: The oddsmakers, plus many fans and experts, made Dalton Smith the underdog against WBC junior welterweight titleholder and feared power-puncher Subriel Matias at Barclays Center in Brooklyn on January 10. What everyone knows now is that Smith is for real and that oddsmakers can sometimes get it wrong – very wrong. The Englishman turned in an inspired performance, battering the Puerto Rican star from pillar to post over the first four rounds before closing out with a right-hand bomb in Round 5. The victory also saw Smith installed as The Ring's No. 1-rated contender at 140 pounds.**

Ed Mulholland

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**DOUG'S TOP 10**

I cannot complain about your picks for the top 10 pound-for-pound fighters of the 21st century ("Ringside," February 2026 issue) and I cannot see anyone I would replace. I am glad you included Gennadiy Golovkin, as I feel he doesn't get the credit he deserves. The guy completely dominated one of the most competitive divisions in boxing. I would just like to add honorable mentions for Miguel Cotto and Juan Manual Marquez – both truly fought anyone.

*Matt Bradbury*

**JUNTO'S P4P STATUS**

I had the pleasure of watching the Naoya Inoue-Alan Picasso and Junto Nakatani-Sebastian Hernandez boxing matches. Both were great. Inoue was dominant, Nakatani not so much. He did win, however, barely. To me it looked like a late Christmas gift, so as not to spoil the big match with Inoue. At the end of the match, Nakatani was a beaten man. In my opinion, he is no longer a Top 10 pound-for-pound boxer.

*Walter Zabicki*

**WORDS OF WISDOM**

My favorite ringside announcers list:

1. Al Bernstein – Met him after the Hagler-Hearns fight and asked who would win a rematch between them. He smiled: "Always Hagler."
2. Max Kellerman – I remember reading that as an aspiring boxing hound he would chase Steve Farhood (KO magazine editor at the time) and ask any and all boxing questions he could and inquired about when he could start working!
3. Marv Albert – Olympics and pro boxing on NBC.
4. Emanuel Steward – Met him at Caesars in Atlantic City and talked with him and another casino host for 20 minutes. He said, "Go for the knockout when you can. That's what the fans want."
5. Gil Clancy and Tim Ryan – A great team.
6. Big George Foreman – Had the non-broadcasting school approach.
7. Larry Merchant – I liked his before and after the bout comments the best.

*Jack Dowling*

**CLOSER THAN WE THOUGHT**

In "Fightline" (January 2026 issue) there was a link from the greatest boxer that ever lived (regardless of what The Money Team says), Sugar Ray Robinson, to Floyd Mayweather in eight steps. Very impressive. However, I managed to find an even shorter link.

As is, the link goes from Robinson » Joey Archer » Emile Griffith » Vito Antuofermo » Marvelous Marvin Hagler » Roberto Duran » Hector "Macho" Camacho » Oscar De La Hoya » Mayweather.

Allow me to introduce into the mix former junior middleweight titleholder Denny Moyer.

Moyer defeated a past-his-prime version of Robinson by 10-round decision on Feb. 17, 1962 (a rematch of a 1961 loss to Robinson). That same Moyer lost a 10-round decision to Vito Antuofermo on September 9, 1974, in Madison Square Garden.

This would make the shortest chain:

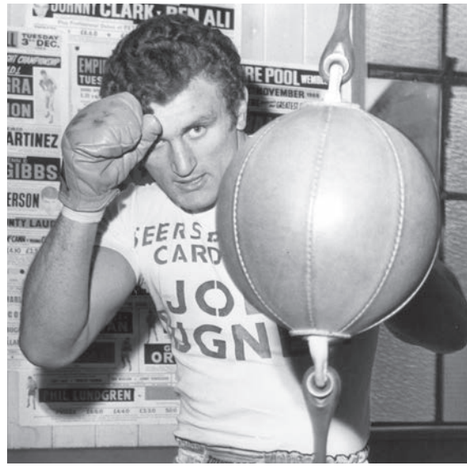
Robinson » MOYER » Vito Antuofermo » Hagler » Duran » Camacho » Oscar » Floyd.

*Darren Calamese*

**ONCE MORE FOR JOE**

I was heartened to read Lee Groves' appreciation of Joe Bugner in The Ring (November 2025 issue). Big Joe was my boxing hero, a genuine contender on the world stage during the heavyweight division's golden era of the 1970s and arguably one the most underrated boxers of all time.

His excellent fight record during that period reads like a who's who of the good and great, but of course his controversial win over Henry Cooper in 1971 made him far more unpopular with both the British press and fight fans than he deserved to be.




**Joe Bugner's talent was sometimes obscured by public sentiment.**

He did have his supporters, though; make no mistake. He was followed in large numbers to Las Vegas for the first Muhammad Ali fight in February 1973 and when he fought Joe Frazier at Earls Court in July the same year, he was roared on by a full house as he produced arguably his greatest performance in losing a close decision over 12 bruising rounds.

It is interesting to note that when Frank Warren began to get his shows on British TV in the early 1980s, Joe was the main attraction. Barry Hearn also persuaded him to return to the U.K. in 1987 for the first big Matchroom boxing promotion when Aussie Joe fought Frank Bruno.

To me, he was a total one-off. Entertaining, funny, brave, controversial – and boy, he could fight. Rest easy, Joe, and thanks for the great memories. I hope you get the respect and legacy you deserve.

*Dean Christopher*

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RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

# THE **RIGHT** CHOICE

**Crawford activated all-time great mode against Canelo Alvarez.**

Until recently, there had been a longstanding consensus among fans and media that Terence Crawford, Oleksandr Usyk and Naoya Inoue were the top three boxers in the world. That dynamic changed with Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez's inevitable ascension up the mythical rankings and Crawford's retirement announcement this past December. However, from 2022 to 2025, boxing's pound-for-pound trinity was "Bud," Usyk and "The Monster."

So it's no surprise that the trio have not only vied for the No. 1 spot in the P4P list, but also for Fighter of the Year honors during the past three years. The Ring's 2023 award went to Inoue. Usyk won it in 2024. Now it's Crawford's turn.

Does he deserve the honor? You're damn right he does.

Nearly 38 at the time, the ringmaster dared to be great, defied the odds and made history when he relieved Canelo Alvarez of the undisputed super middleweight championship on September 13. The clear-cut decision victory – hands down the best performance of 2025 and the event of the year – pushed Crawford's name into all-time great company.

He joined Bob Fitzsimmons, Tony Canzoneri, Barney Ross and Henry Armstrong as boxing's only three-division undisputed champions. Crawford also equaled Thomas Hearns, Sugar Ray Leonard and Floyd Mayweather Jr. by winning world titles in five weight classes.

Most years, an achievement of that historic magnitude would guarantee the award for most outstanding boxer. However, more than a few fans, websites and podcast hosts declared Inoue as their 2025 Fighter of the Year.

I don't agree with that opinion, but I respect it. Inoue is every bit the generational talent and competitor that Crawford is, and the Japanese superstar

was impressive in 2025 – defending his undisputed junior featherweight championship four times.

The main argument for Inoue as the 2025 Fighter of the Year is, of course, his activity. And, as my longtime colleague Steve Kim is fond of saying, "activity matters."

It's the reason Inoue beat out Crawford in 2023, according to The Ring, ESPN and the Boxing Writers Association of America. However, it wasn't a slam-dunk choice. Crawford was a very close runner-up. As he did in 2025, the Omaha native put forth a sublime performance in the biggest U.S. boxing event – his emphatic ninth-round stoppage of Errol Spence Jr., who entered the showdown as an undefeated unified titleholder, The Ring's No. 1-rated welterweight and No. 4 in the pound-for-pound rankings.

However, four days prior to Crawford's greatest triumph to date, Inoue scored one of the best wins of his future Hall of Fame career, an eighth-round stoppage of previously unbeaten unified 122-pound titleholder Stephen Fulton.

The Fulton victory silenced The Monster's critics who claimed he hadn't fought anyone of note and predicted that he would be "exposed" by the skilled American. Adding to the significance of the one-sided victory was that it was the junior featherweight debut for Inoue, who had ended 2022 as the undisputed bantamweight champion. In his first bout of his fourth weight class, Inoue took on The Ring's No. 1-rated 122-pounder.

In his second bout of 2023, he beat down No. 2-rated Marlon Tapales, holder of the other 122-pound belts, to a 10th-round stoppage and undisputed champion status in his second division.

Both Inoue and Crawford made history. Both proved to be elite-level boxers. But The Monster did a little bit more, to the chagrin of Bud's boosters.

Inoue did a lot more than Crawford in 2025 in terms of sheer activity, but the overall quality of his opposition was not as high as it was in 2023.

Had all four of his challengers been legitimate contenders, I likely would have considered him the cream of the 2025 crop. However, his first two opponents of the year – Ye Joon Kim and Ramon Cardenas – were not Ring-rated at the time. In Inoue's defense, Kim was a late substitute (for Sam Goodman) and was needed to keep the January fight date as well as his four-bout schedule for the year, while Cardenas – who is now in The Ring's 122-pound rankings – turned out to be a card-carrying badass. Regardless, Inoue was a ridiculous favorite (as much as -1000) going into both bouts.

Near shutout decisions vs. former unified titleholder Murodjon Akhmadaliev and unbeaten contender Alan Picasso in his other two bouts of 2025, while not as exciting as his KO of Kim or his shootout with Cardenas, were elite-level performances vs. world-class opposition.

I should note that Inoue's original plan for 2025 was to defend against then-unbeaten Goodman (No. 3 in The Ring's 122-pound rankings at the time) in January, then Picasso (No. 5 at the start of 2025) in May, and then Akhmadaliev (No. 2) in September, with an option for a fourth bout. Had he gone that route and faced a fourth Ring-rated junior featherweight, such as Shabaz Masoud (No. 6 at the beginning of 2025) or Sebastian Hernandez (No. 10 at the start of the year), I think he might have legitimately edged out Crawford for Fighter of the Year.

As it was, Inoue was the first champion to make four defenses of the Ring Magazine title in a calendar year since Larry Holmes did it in 1983. It's an impressive stat. But in 2025, it was Crawford who did more with less.

And with his retirement

**The great Inoue made his fourth defense of 2025 against Alan Picasso.**



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announcement, it looks like the Canelo victory will be the final act of a Hall of Fame career. I'm pleased that Crawford exits the combat side of boxing as The Ring's Fighter of the Year.

★★★★

**While we're on the subject of** Fighter of the Year, congrats to Mizuki Hiruta, who won the female version of the 2025 award. The 29-year-old native of Okayama, Japan, beat out a distinguished field that included future hall of famers Katie Taylor and Mikaela Mayer for the honor.

All five female nominees – Hiruta, Taylor, Mayer, Ellie Scotney and Evelin Bermudez – were strong candidates who defeated top opposition in 2025. However, Taylor only fought once (a unanimous decision over archrival Amanda Serrano), while the other nominees each made only two ring appearances last year.

Our winner, Hiruta (10-0, 2 KOs) – the first Japanese boxer, male or female, to win the Ring junior bantamweight title – took a page from her superstar countryman's playbook and fought four times.

The athletic southpaw, who has held the WBO 115-pound title since 2022, won the vacant Ring championship by outpointing highly regarded Carla Merino in her second bout of 2025 and then defended it twice before the end of the year.

Unlike the men's category, this time activity mattered.

★★★★

**Our hearts go out to Anthony** Joshua and to the families of the former heavyweight champ's teammates, Sina Ghami and Latif "Latz" Ayodele, who were killed in a car accident in Nigeria on December 29.

Joshua, who was vacationing in his parents' homeland just 10 days after stopping Jake Paul in Miami, was a passenger in the Lexus SUV that collided with a stationary truck along the Lagos-Ibadan expressway in Makun.

The professional driver of the vehicle, who escaped with minor injuries, has been charged with dangerous and reckless driving.

Joshua also sustained minor injuries and was hospitalized for two days, but while he's expected to make a full physical recovery, the emotional and psychological toll of the tragedy has put his 2026 plans – which included an early ring return and then the long-awaited showdown with Tyson Fury later in the year – on hold for the time being.

Ghami was Joshua's strength and conditioning coach, while Ayodele was an assistant trainer, but they were also two of his closest friends.

On January 8, Joshua posted the following tribute on his Instagram account:

"Thank you for all the love and care you have shown my brothers. I didn't even realise how special they are. I'll just be walking with them and cracking jokes with them, not even knowing God kept me in the presence of great men. 100% it's tough for me, but I know it's even tougher for their parents. I have a strong mind, and I believe God knows their hearts. May God have mercy on my brothers."

Some have speculated that this tragic event could encourage the 36-year-old Brit to retire. If Joshua does indeed hang up his gloves, I expect to see his name on the International Boxing Hall of Fame ballot in three years.

He's an Olympic gold medalist, a two-time unified heavyweight titleholder and bona fide superstar. Even the shocking KOs he suffered to Andy Ruiz and Daniel Dubois – the only times I saw him fight live – rank as two of the most electric atmospheres I've ever experienced as a fan and journalist.

At one time, he was the most accomplished heavyweight in the sport. His losses shouldn't overshadow victories over Wladimir Klitschko, Alexander Povetkin, Joseph Parker, Dillian Whyte and Ruiz (in the rematch). Personally, I don't hold the back-to-back decision losses to Usyk against him. He was competitive in both bouts. No shame in losing to a great fighter.

Whatever Joshua decides, The Ring wishes him well.

**Hiruta's Ring belt was presented by venerable Editor-in-Chief Doug Fischer.**

After weathering punishment, Kabayel finished off Damian Knyba in the third round.

# ABOUT TIME

By Al Bernstein

There is an old bromide that heavyweight boxers come into their own later and stay better longer than boxers in lighter weight divisions. The first part has proven true for 33-year-old heavyweight Agit Kabayel, and he's hoping the second part will as well.

When Kabayel beat previously undefeated Polish giant Damian Knyba by stoppage in three rounds on January 10, he cemented his position as the people's choice for top contender in the division. That win ended an 11-month layoff that was preceded by a trio of career-changing fights.

After his career had slowly percolated for 12 years, the unbeaten Kabayel erupted with three major wins from December 2023 to February 2025, stopping Arslanbek Makhmudov, Frank Sanchez and Zhilei Zhang, in that order. Makhmudov and Sanchez were undefeated at the time, and Zhang, with only two losses in 30 fights, was coming off a KO win over Deontay Wilder and a close majority decision loss to Joseph Parker. All three of these Kabayel opponents were ranked in or just outside the top 10 when he fought them.

The Knyba fight had two very important purposes. First, it was a homecoming for Germany's Kabayel after the three aforementioned fights had dramatically jump-started his career in Saudi Arabia. It was designed to announce in a big way that major-league boxing was back in Germany and it succeeded on that front, with 13,000 boisterous fans filling the Rudolf Weber Arena in Oberhausen.

Second, this fight was important to give Kabayel a chance to shake off the ring rust of the layoff and position himself for a major 2026 match, hopefully for a world title. Knyba provided the right opposition because he was unbeaten and a competent fighter. He demonstrated the latter in Round 1, stunning the crowd by raking Kabayel over the coals with jabs, uppercuts and straight right hands, resulting in a nasty cut over Kabayel's right eye. Whether this was all due to the layoff or Kabayel's penchant for defensive lapses can be debated. Whatever the reason, it created urgency in Kabayel; he needed to make sure this homecoming didn't turn sour. He did just that by upping the ante in the second and third rounds, hurting Knyba with body shots and big right hands. The last big right completed a series of big blows that convinced referee Mark Lyson to stop the fight, even though Knyba had never hit the canvas. Many (including me) thought the stoppage was premature, though it certainly appeared that Kabayel had gotten control of the fight and might very likely have stopped Knyba after this point. Lyson's quick trigger (whether out of incompetence or bias for the favorite) actually took away Kabayel's chance for a more definitive and beneficial ending to this fight.

Even in just under three rounds, this win reminded us of the four things that define Kabayel (27-0, 19 KOs) as a fighter:

1. **He is one of the best body-punchers in boxing. He hurt Knyba several times to the body, and that is what set up the head shots that ended this fight. In his three signature wins over Makhmudov, Sanchez and Zhang, he scored six knockdowns – ALL by body shots. When he gets a fighter in trouble with body shots, he shows the discipline and ring intellect to double down for the stoppage.**
2. **He has a great chin. Knyba landed some big power punches and did not shake him. Kabayel had suffered a knockdown against the big punching Zhang but got right up and stopped Zhang in the next round. He has very good punch resistance.**
3. **The great chin saves him from his defensive liabilities. In the Knyba fight, as in some others, Kabayel showed vulnerability: When he walks down his opponents, he sometimes keeps his hands low and can square himself up, inviting a straight shot down the middle.**
4. **When he uses his jab, his offense is very impressive. He can be effective without it, but the difference between the Kabayel who comes in behind an authoritative jab and the Kabayel who does not is huge. With it, he is an offensive machine. Using the jab masks the defensive problems almost entirely.**

What all that adds up to is an exciting, all-action heavyweight who has come from relative international obscurity to being a worldwide fan favorite. Support from the big pockets of Riyadh Season and a German fan base that appears willing to pack arenas for him provides a fascinating recipe for commercial boxing success.

This brings us to the conundrum of Kabayel's future and how it impacts the very intriguing heavyweight division. Other layoffs have slowed his career (he had only one fight per year for five straight years, from 2018 to 2022). He can ill afford that now.

One issue is that a title shot against IBF, WBA, WBC and Ring Magazine champ Oleksandr Usyk is off the table for now because Usyk has Wilder penciled in as his next dance partner. A fight with Usyk (if he defends successfully against Wilder) is not likely until the end of the year. Kabayel must fight before that. The conventional business-oriented choice for him would be someone like Lawrence Okolie, the former cruiserweight titleholder who is now the No. 1-rated heavyweight contender in the WBC rankings. It can be sold to fans and media as a meaningful fight despite a lower threat level to Kabayel than some other fights might present. That all makes it palatable to the Kabayel team.

Then there is the option that epitomizes what boxing does not do often enough. This is an option where boxing fans get exactly the fight they would *really* like to see – the one where two action fighters come together in a can't-miss match. This is the one where newly crowned WBO titleholder Fabio Wardley puts his belt on the line against Kabayel. Am I being naive for even mentioning this possibility? Worse, am I possibly delusional, suggesting something that exists outside of boxing reality as we know it?

The answer could be yes to those two questions. Or maybe not. Dream with me for a second. Kabayel said he is very open to a Wardley fight. Both fighters are promoted by Frank Warren's Queensberry Promotions, and Riyadh Season has been involved with both. That last fact is likely the key. Could there be enough financial incentive to make both fighters risk seeing a possible big-money showdown with Usyk slip away? Will Riyadh Season pony up the kind of money it will take to make this happen? For the sake of boxing fans, I hope the answer is yes. There are few boxing matches on the horizon as delicious as this one.

Fabio Wardley vs. Kabayel would be satisfaction all but guaranteed for fans.

The other thing that makes this a slightly less risky venture for Wardley and Kabayel is the undeniable fact that heavyweights can bounce back from a loss much easier than in other weight divisions. We have seen fighters like Parker, Wilder, Joe Joyce, Derek Chisora, Daniel Dubois, Anthony Joshua and others written off after a loss or even two, only to return for big fights. A loss for either man here does not end their time as an upper-echelon, money-making, title-contending heavyweight.

Many in sports media these days seek to create actions in the discipline they cover, not just report on them. They want to be the ones moving the needle, either to produce something they want to see or think is good for their sport, or just to claim credit for making it happen. We have such people in boxing as well. I have not been a charter member of that group in my 41 years of service. But here and now, I am going to be an advocate. Count me in as a foot soldier in the battle to get a Wardley-Kabayel fight to happen. I ask other pundits and fans to join the fray to push for it to come to fruition. I also ask them to join me in taking a pledge *not* to denigrate the loser should he take this bold plunge when he didn't have to do it.

Both Kabayel and Wardley have had a slow, steady burn in their careers, which has put them both in rarified heavyweight championship air. I am now suggesting that they light a bonfire in the ring right there on the mountaintop. RING

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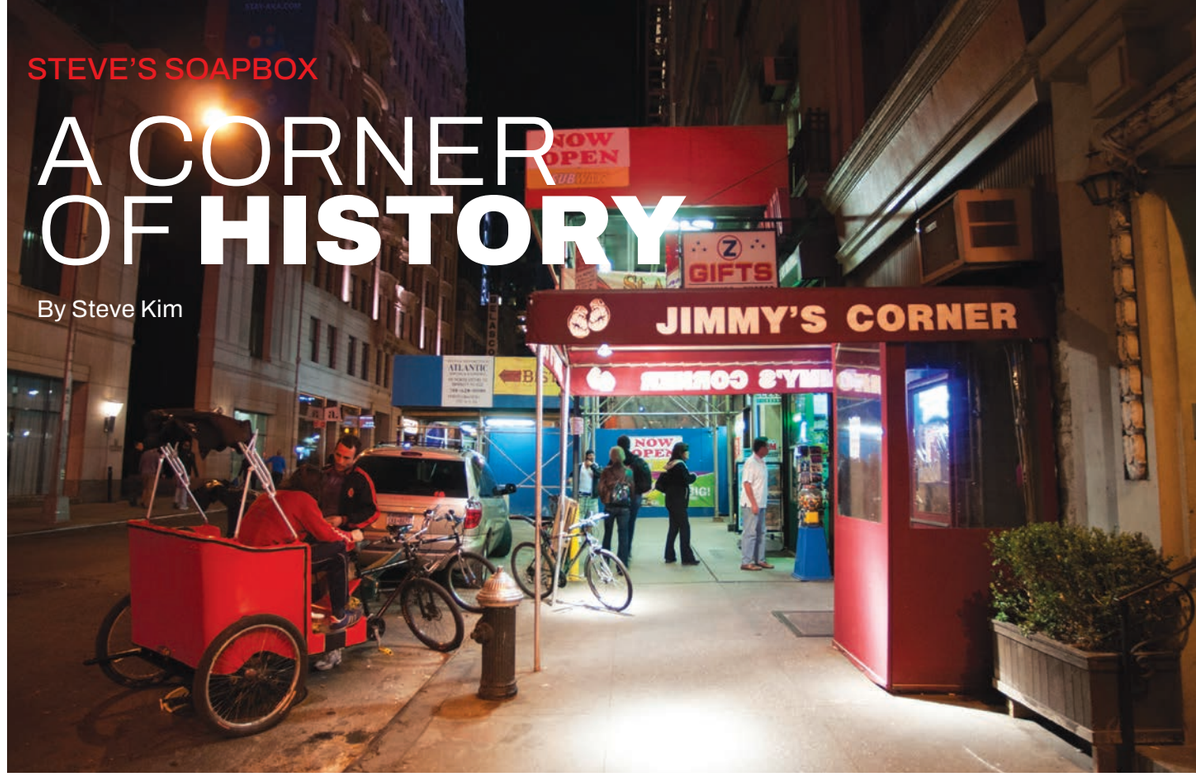
Richard Pelham

STEVE'S SOAPBOX

# A CORNER OF HISTORY

By Steve Kim




**For boxing fans, Jimmy's Corner in New York City is more than just a bar.**

Since 1971, Jimmy's Corner has stood at 140 W. 44th Street in New York City, half a block east of Times Square. Founded by the late Jimmy Glenn, it has weathered the test of time. As the Big Apple has gone through several versions of itself and retail gentrification has taken over, this bar has remained the same, becoming an institution to locals and a destination for visitors.

Boxing fans flock to it like tourists flock to the Statue of Liberty.

The modern amenities are non-existent (don't ask for their WiFi) and there are very few frills. That's part of its charm and authenticity. If you want a cozy space where you can still have $3 beers and some laughs, this is your spot. Yeah, other places are more comfortable, but there isn't a place with a better atmosphere. You can't get this at Buffalo Wild Wings or Dave & Buster's.

When the beloved Glenn passed away in 2020 at the age of 89, ownership was taken over by his son Adam, a graduate of Harvard Law School who returned to run the family business.

But in December, it was reported that The Durst Organization, which owns the property, attempted to evict them over a clause that was in the last lease that Jimmy signed. Adam decided to counterpunch and has now gone on the offensive.

"The latest right now is that according to the landlord, they have canceled our lease," Glenn told Ring Magazine in mid-January. "According to us, the provision that they're relying on to cancel our lease should be invalid. We each have parallel legal cases that we have brought and we're just starting out the fight."

Throughout the decades, the relationship between the landlord and tenant was a good one. When asked if all of this has shocked him, Glenn stated, "It surprised me in the sense that there's a mechanism in our existing lease for them to be able to get me out of this space. [...] I didn't know this provision was out there 'til about two years ago.

"It's surprising that they tried to do this in such an ugly way. It's not shocking to me that at some point [they thought] that they could make more money by selling the building. But the way they've gone about doing it has been very surprising."

This conflict has gone mainstream in New York, covered extensively by local news outlets. Again, this isn't your normal watering hole. It reached icon status decades ago.

The Durst Organization released this statement to New York City TV station WPIX: "For decades, we did everything we could to help keep the bar's doors open including providing extremely favorable rent. After Jimmy's tragic death, we decided to sell the building and we went above and beyond our lease obligations. We told Adam Glenn over a year ago he would have to vacate the building, we offered him $250,000 even though we were not required to do so, and allowed the bar to remain open longer. These efforts have not been met

with good faith."

You often hear Jimmy's Corner described as a "dive bar," which for the most part is a compliment. Glenn calls it "a neighborhood bar without a neighborhood." Much of what made this place special was Jimmy, a boxing lifer who fought, then trained and managed fighters throughout his life, and even ran his own gym. As you walk down the narrow pathway all the way to the back, various fight posters and a pictorial history of Jimmy's life in the sport (including one of him with Muhammad Ali) are displayed on the walls.

"My dad looked at the bar very much as his legacy and the thing he was leaving. And later in life, like his career in boxing, it was something he was proud of," said his son. "He was proud that he was able to build something and that he was able to touch so many people's lives."

For Adam, who manages boxers and operates his own streaming service (BXNG TV), returning to Jimmy's Corner was no burden, but a calling. His return was hastened about a decade ago when his mother, Swietlana (better known to the regulars as "Swanie") fell ill. "I feel like the bar has always been a part of who I was. My mom and dad built it together. It became a part of their routine and their life, their DNA, and something they were proud of."

Glenn didn't leave a career in law; he came back home to where he belonged. This is very much a family-run business. His brother, James Jr., and nephew Karriem Mitchell work at Jimmy's Corner. The staff, in Glenn's view, is part of the extended family. Even with his busy schedule and outside obligations, at some point he will be at the bar doing such things as taking inventory or taking care of payroll. "Every day involves the bar in some fashion."

Jimmy's isn't just a museum of boxing memorabilia, but a place where boxing business was consummated. Carl Moretti, the VP of boxing operations for Top Rank, worked for MSG Boxing (the now-defunct promotional arm of Madison Square Garden) from 1986 to 1995. Moretti recalls, "There were no cell phones, there was no internet or anything like that. But I can tell you that I sat with Mike Trainer (adviser to Ray Leonard), and Bobby Goodman (matchmaker) and Johnny Boz (matchmaker and agent) after a show we had at the Felt Forum, from about 12:30 p.m. to 5 a.m. – that's where the whole Sugar Ray Leonard-Terry Norris fight was made, as well as Leonard-Donny Lalonde. That's where it got done."

**Jimmy's son Adam is determined to keep the bar's legacy alive.**

This was the Zoom meeting of that era.

Moretti said that after every show at The Garden, about 10 blocks south, everyone would eventually congregate at Jimmy's Corner, which is basically true to this day. If you go to a fight card at MSG, you will see many of the same people at Jimmy's afterward – sometimes waiting to get in (they're pretty strict about adhering to the fire code.)

The thought of moving Jimmy's Corner is depressing, but it's not entirely without precedent. Madison Square Garden itself isn't the same arena or at the same location that it was when it was founded way back in the late 1800s.

Could this beloved bar be the same with a different address? The reality is that the existing lease ends in 2029, and Jimmy's Corner may have to relocate. It's something that Glenn has pondered. He isn't naive to the reality at hand. But then, does anything ever truly stay the same forever?

"When my mom died, it was, 'How is Jimmy's ever going to be Jimmy's without 'Swanie' in it?' And then when my dad died, it was never the same – but it was still great," he stated. "People were used to seeing him there, sitting right there by the big boxing glove [sculpture], or at the bar talking. How can you have Jimmy's Corner without Jimmy?"

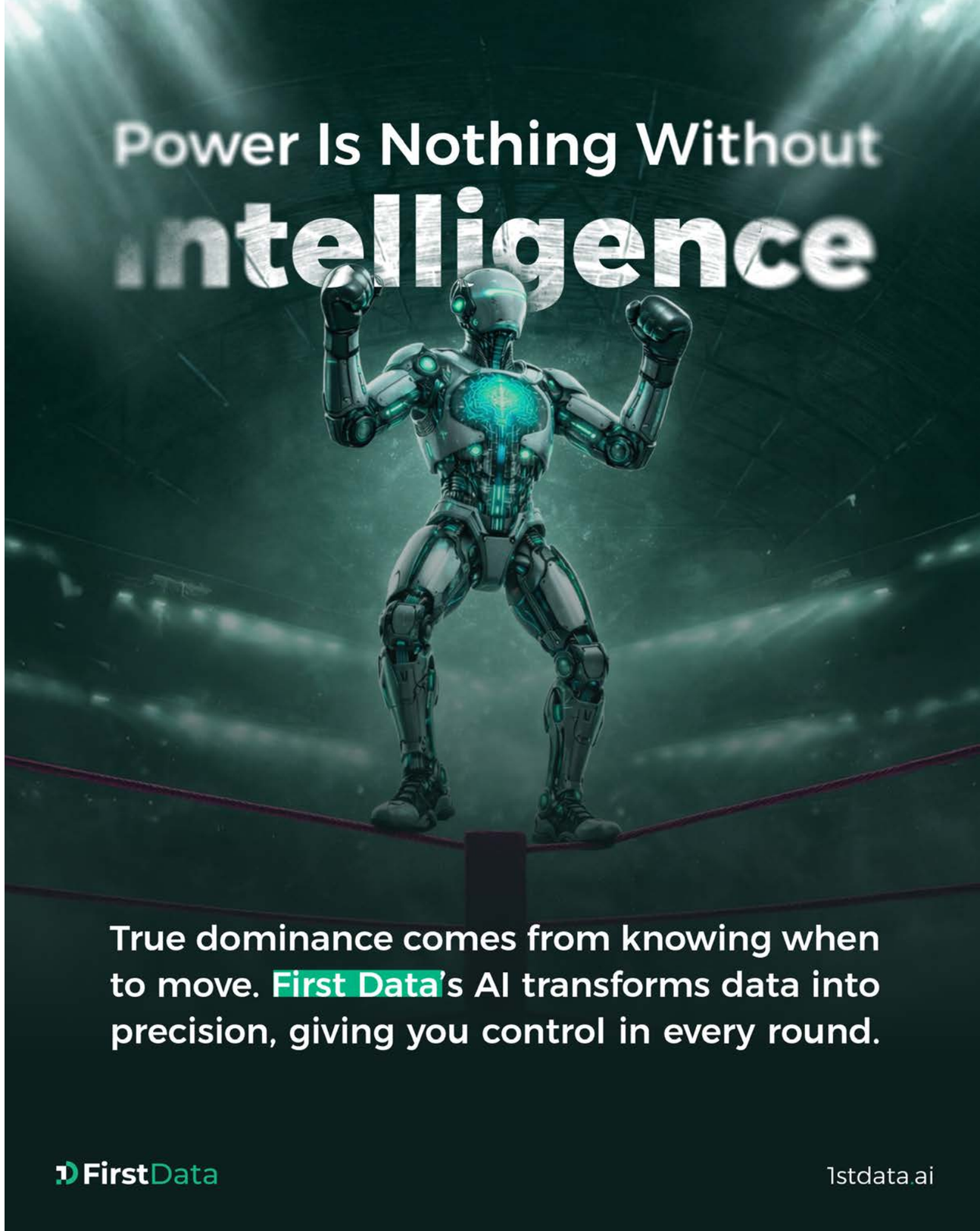
Glenn admits that reopening post-Covid changed things, but adds "it's still great; it's still a wonderful place."

The bottom line is that there is still a fight to be had ("We're not going to let anyone just bully us and push us out," Glenn says), but 2029 will be here before you know it.

"No court is going to just award me that building," said Glenn. "So whether it's six months from now, a year from now or four or five years from now, at some point, unfortunately, Jimmy's most likely will not be in that location. Now maybe, depending on the developer or someone else, [they] might think that it makes sense to make a space for Jimmy's Corner – which I think it does – but I'm not going to rely on that.

"I also want to take the next step. [What] my dad would really be happy with and proud of is if one day [we went] from being renters to becoming owners so no one can ever take advantage of us." RING





BY THE NUMBERS:

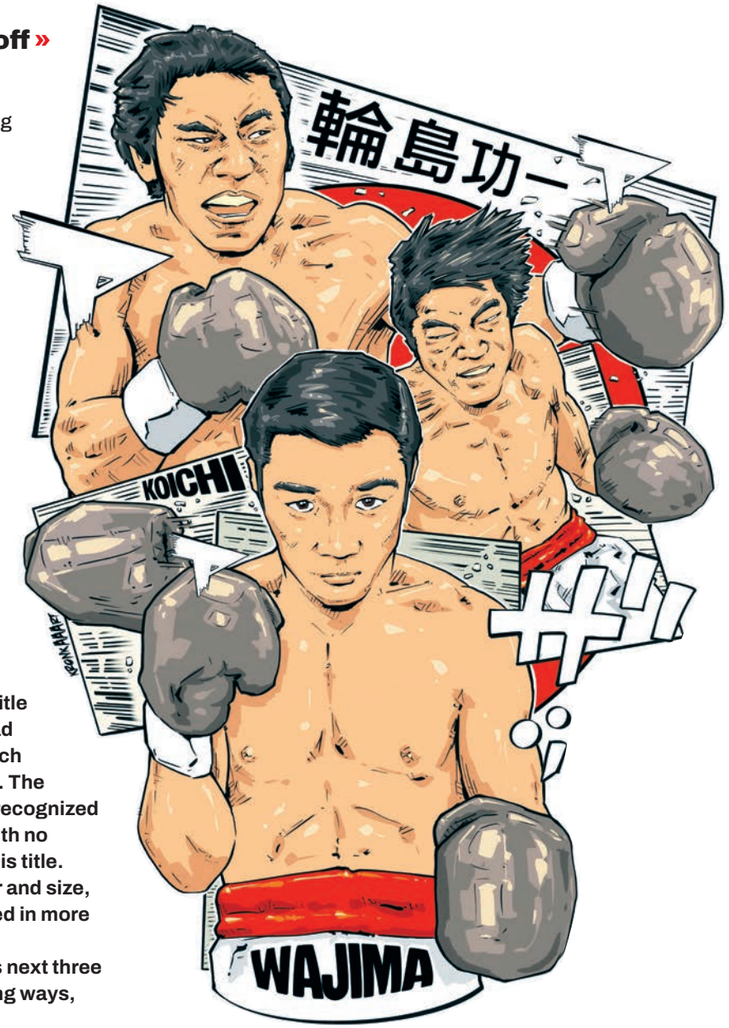
# KOICHI WAJIMA

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

**He's not in the International Boxing Hall of Fame and you've probably not heard of him, but Koichi Wajima was one of the great Japanese sluggers of the 1970s. A three-time junior middleweight champion, Wajima's style was all-action. Forget jabs. Wajima blasted away with hooks and uppercuts and a right hand thrown like he was whipping a fastball over home plate. He was also known for bobbing and weaving in a peculiar swaying motion, waiting for the moment when he'd squat down and leap up at an opponent with his "frog jump uppercut," an explosive move that made fans roar. Overall, Wajima was an entertaining and eccentric figure, earning the nickname "Hono no Otoko" (Translation: Man of Flame). Granted, defense wasn't on the menu when Wajima fought. Every fight was a shootout, and sometimes Wajima came out on the wrong end of things. This made for a thrilling career. Here's his story by the numbers.**

## 7 straight KOs to kick things off »

According to legend, Wajima's struggling parents put him up for adoption when he was a child. After working in his stepfamily's fishing business and then supporting himself by driving a dump truck, Wajima did what so many have done to escape poverty: He took up boxing. Turning professional in June of 1968, Wajima scored seven consecutive KOs, none of his opponents lasting past the fourth round.




## 141 seconds with Pedro Adigue »

**Wajima seemed off to a great start, winning the Japanese junior middleweight title in only his 12th pro fight. Disaster struck for his unlucky 13th bout, a matchup with Pedro Adigue in Tokyo. Adigue was an acclaimed Filipino veteran who had recently won the WBC junior welterweight title. In a bout where neither fighter's belt was on the line, Adigue scored a shocking KO at 2:21 of the first round.**

**It wasn't unusual for a young, up-and-coming fighter such as Wajima to be matched in a non-title bout against an older but smaller fighter who had a name. In fact, from the 1930s to the 1950s, such matches were practically de rigueur in America. The younger, heavier fighter usually won, putting a recognized name on his record, while the smaller fighter, with no belt at stake, returned to his weight class with his title. This time, the plan backfired. Despite his power and size, Wajima was still raw, while Adigue had competed in more than 40 pro bouts.**

**The result didn't matter much. Adigue lost his next three fights, while Wajima soon got back to his winning ways, including an eight-bout KO streak.**

## 15 rounds with Carmelo Bossi »

Wajima's 25th fight was against junior middleweight champion Carmelo Bossi, a veteran who had won a silver medal as part of Italy's acclaimed Olympic team of 1960. On October 31, 1971, Wajima defeated Bossi by split decision and claimed the undisputed 154-pound championship consisting of the WBA and WBC titles. Rather than hail his accomplishment, the Japanese dailies criticized Wajima for his peculiar style. Granted, Wajima's roughhousing gave Bossi fits, as did his froggy-style uppercut, but boxing purists saw little in him to praise. Japan's largest newspaper, the Asahi Shimbun, described the contest as "like a scuffle, or fight between gangsters."

## 6 title defenses during his first reign »

**Between May of 1972 and February 1974, Wajima made six successful title defenses, including a lightning-quick KO of Domenico Tiberia in Fukuoka. It remains among the quickest junior middleweight title fights in history, lasting only 109 seconds.**

**There were also two hairpin-close bouts with Brazil's Miguel de Oliveira, the first ending in a draw, the second in a majority verdict for Wajima. Many felt Oliveira had deserved the first bout and picked him to win the second. Wajima proved his critics wrong by being, as the United Press reported, "the aggressor all the way."**

## 2 fights with Oscar "Shotgun" Albarado »

One of Wajima's great rivalries was with "Shotgun" Albarado, a scrappy contender from Pecos, Texas. Albarado, who'd had more than 50 bouts and was tougher than a burnt steak, challenged Wajima for the title in June of 1974 in Tokyo. The defending champion seemed on his way to a decision win, ahead on two scorecards as the 15th round began. Yet Albarado stormed out and smashed Wajima to the canvas three times, scoring a KO at 1:57 of the final round.

The rematch seven months later was another long-distance brawl, but this time Wajima was relentless, throwing heavy punches with incredible accuracy. Before a crowd of 9,000 at Nihon University Auditorium, Wajima won by unanimous 15-round decision to reclaim the championship. His bruised face a reflection of the combat he'd just endured, Wajima won by scores of 69-67, 70-69 and 75-68. The AP had it for Wajima, 73-67. It may have been his finest hour.

## 3 turns as champion »

**A mere six months after regaining the laurels from Albarado, Wajima found himself rudely knocked out by South Korea's Jae-doo Yuh. A former sugar factory worker, Yuh stopped Wajima in seven at the Kitakyushu Municipal Gymnasium in southern Japan.**

**Though he was now in his 30s and seemed spent after twice losing his title by KO, Wajima steeled himself for one last stand. Once again in the challenger's role, Wajima met Yuh in a rematch at Nihon University in February 1976. It was a glorious return to form, as Wajima dropped the South Korean in the eighth, bloodied his nose during the final few rounds and scored a KO at 1:47 of the 15th. The decisive punch, according to newswires, was "a crunching right straight to the face."**

**Unfortunately, Wajima's third reign would be brief. Three months after regaining the title, Wajima was knocked out in 14 by Jose Duran.**

**The next year, at the famous Budokan Hall in Chiyoda, Tokyo, Wajima looked pitiful as he suffered another KO loss, this time to Ring/WBA champion Eddie Gazo. After he endured two brutal knockdowns, Wajima's handlers tossed in the towel at 0:45 of the 11th. Wajima never fought again, leaving the business with a record of 31-6-1 with 25 KOs.**

## 100,000,000 copies of a manga »

Wajima enjoyed a well-deserved post-career celebrity, turning up on game shows and taking roles in television dramas.

Since 1989, Wajima's legacy has lived on (sort of) in a top-selling Japanese manga series, Hajime no Ippo, where one of the core characters, a fictional boxer named Masaru Aoki, is a master of the "frog punch." The series creator and illustrator, George Morikawa, has referenced Wajima as an inspiration.

From his tough childhood to being a three-time champion to having his signature move immortalized in a best-selling manga series and cult classic anime, Wajima's life has been a sort of dream, from rags to riches to manga. He's still alive at 82. Here's to Japan's Man of Flame, still burning bright. RING

# Konoz: Documenting Saudi Creativity in an Era of Transformation

In the rapidly evolving Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Konoz initiative was launched in 2023 to celebrate Saudi Arabia's cultural and intellectual creativity. Konoz—meaning "treasures"—an initiative of the Saudi Ministry of Media, embodies the country's commitment to documenting its rich cultural heritage, innovative spirit, and civilizational contributions. Financed by the Human Capacity Development Program under Vision 2030, a plan to reduce oil dependence and diversify the economy by growing sectors like culture and tourism, Konoz's mission is to showcase the many treasures of Saudi Arabia, from its vibrant culture to its breathtaking natural beauty.

Among Konoz's productions is the documentary *Horizon*, currently available on Netflix, which offers a visually captivating exploration of Saudi Arabia's natural wonders through high-quality storytelling and environmental advocacy. Beyond *Horizon*, Konoz has created other notable productions including *Saudi Atlas* and the animated series *Al-Rahebeen*, along with documentary films such as *Ala Hadden Sawa*, *Safraa's Night*, and *The Destination*—broadening global perspectives on Saudi Arabia's urban and social development.

Looking ahead, Konoz plans to continue expanding its portfolio with new projects that further explore Saudi Arabia's natural and cultural heritage. Upcoming docuseries include NEW WONDERS, spotlighting Saudi Arabia's giga-projects; +966, exploring the roots of Saudi identity and its enduring cultural and human legacy; and Beyond Industry, tracing the evolution of the Kingdom's industrial sector over time.

Konoz represents a cultural renaissance that captures the essence of Saudi Arabia's past, present, and future. Through its engaging and insightful productions, Konoz not only documents the Kingdom's hidden treasures but also shares an inspired and woken sense of national pride embodying the spirit and vision of Saudi Arabia's future.

ADVERTORIAL

# Ring Ratings Through fights of January 17, 2026

Richard Pelham

## Recent Fight Results

### MEN

**P4P:** Terence Crawford (No. 1) retired
**H:** Tyson Fury (No. 1) removed for inactivity
**H:** Joseph Parker (No. 4) removed for positive PED test
**H:** Agit Kabayel (No. 2) TKO 3 Damian Knyba
**200:** Leonardo Mosquea (No. 7) KO 8 Jeison Troncoso
**168:** Terence Crawford (C) retired
**147:** Raul Curiel (No. 8) UD 10 Jordan Panthen
**140:** Dalton Smith (No. 7, ▲6) TKO 5 Subriel Matias (No. 2, ▼5)
**122:** Sam Goodman (in at No. 3) UD 10 Tyler Blizzard
**122:** Ramon Cardenas (No. 7, ▲2) KO 5 Erik Robles Ayala
**122:** Naoya Inoue (C) UD 12 Alan Picasso (No. 3, ▼4)
**122:** Junto Nakatani (in at No. 4) UD 12 Sebastian Hernandez (No. 7, ▲2)
**118:** Seiya Tsutsumi (No. 1) SD 12 Nonito Donaire
**118:** Kazuto Ioka (in at No. 9) KO 4 Maikel Ordosgoitti
**115:** Kazuto Ioka (No. 2) out, moved up in weight
**112:** Anthony Olascuaga (No. 6, ▲3) TKO 4 Taku Kuwahara
**112:** Seigo Yuri Akui (No. 4, ▲1) KO 3 Vencent Lacar
**112:** Kenshiro Teraji (No. 2) out, moved up in weight
**112:** Masamichi Yabuki (No. 5, ▲3) KO 12 Felix Alvarado (No. 8)
**108:** Rene Santiago (No. 3, ▲2) SD 12 Kyosuke Takami (No. 2, ▼2)

### WOMEN

**160:** Kaye Scott (in at No. 4) MD 10 Olivia Curry (in at No. 5)
**135:** Caroline Dubois (No. 1) UD 10 Camilla Panatta
**135:** Stephanie Han (in at No. 5) TD 7 Holly Holm (No. 5, out)
**126:** Amanda Serrano (C) UD 10 Reina Tellez
**118:** Cherneka Johnson (No. 1) UD 10 Amanda Galle
**105:** Yokasta Valle (No. 1) MD 10 Yadira Bustillos
**102:** Esneidy Rodriguez Olmos (No. 4, ▲1) UD 10 Betty Franco

# MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Jan. 17, 2026

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

### HEAVYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT UNLIMITED*

**C** **OLEKSANDR USYK** ◆◆◆◆
Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)

**1** ▲+1 **FABIO WARDLEY** ◆
U.K. • 20-0-1 (19 KOs)

**2** ▲+1 **AGIT KABAYEL**
Germany • 27-0-0 (19 KOs)

**3** ▲+2 **DANIEL DUBOIS**
U.K. • 22-3-0 (21 KOs)

**4** ▲+2 **FILIP HRGOVIC**
Croatia • 19-1-0 (14 KOs)

**5** ▲+2 **ZHILEI ZHANG**
China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)

**6** ▲+2 **MARTIN BAKOLE**
Congo • 21-2-1 (16 KOs)

**7** ▲+2 **MOSES ITAUMA**
U.K. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)

**8** ▲+2 **EFE AJAGBA**
Nigeria • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)

**9** ★ **RICHARD TORREZ JR.**
U.S. • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)

**10** ★ **MURAT GASSIEV**
Russia • 33-2-0 (26 KOs)

### CRUISERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS*

**C** **JAI OPETAIA** ◆◆
Australia • 29-0-0 (23 KOs)

**1** **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** ◆◆
Mexico • 48-1-0 (30 KOs)

**2** **CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH**
U.K. • 21-2-0 (13 KOs)

**3** **MICHAL CIESLAK**
Poland • 28-2-0 (22 KOs)

**4** **NOEL MIKAELIAN** ◆
Armenia • 28-3-0 (12 KOs)

**5** **RYAN ROZICKI**
Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)

**6** **BADOU JACK**
Sweden • 29-4-3 (17 KOs)

**7** **LEONARDO MOSQUEA**
France • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)

**8** **ROBIN SIRWAN SAFAR**
Sweden • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

**9** **VIDDAL RILEY**
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)

**10** **BRANDON GLANTON**
U.S. • 21-3-0 (18 KOs)

### LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS*

**C** **DMITRY BIVOL** ◆◆◆◆
Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

**1** **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)

**2** **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** ◆
U.S. • 31-0-0 (25 KOs)

**3** **CALLUM SMITH**
U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)

**4** **ALBERT RAMIREZ**
Venezuela • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)

**5** **ANTHONY YARDE**
U.K. • 27-4-0 (24 KOs)

**6** **DAVID MORRELL**
Cuba • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)

**7** **IMAM KHATAEV**
Australia • 11-1-0 (10 KOs)

**8** **JOSHUA BUATSI**
U.K. • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)

**9** **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**
Ukraine • 21-2-0 (17 KOs)

**10** **WILLY HUTCHINSON**
U.K. • 19-2-0 (14 KOs)

### SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS*

**C** **(VACANT)**

**1** **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 63-3-2 (39 KOs)

**2** **OSLEYS IGLESIAS**
Cuba • 14-0-0 (13 KOs)

**3** **CHRISTIAN MBILLI**
France • 29-0-1 (24 KOs)

**4** **LESTER MARTINEZ**
Guatemala • 19-0-1 (16 KOs)

**5** **DIEGO PACHECO**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)

**6** **JOSE ARMANDO RESENDIZ** ◆
Mexico • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)

**7** **CALEB PLANT**
U.S. • 23-3-0 (14 KOs)

**8** **HAMZAH SHEERAZ**
U.K. • 22-0-1 (18 KOs)

**9** **BRUNO SURACE**
France • 26-1-2 (5 KOs)

**10** **WILLIAM SCULL**
Cuba • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)

### MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS*

**C** **(VACANT)**

**1** **CARLOS ADAMES** ◆
Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)

**2** **YOENLI HERNANDEZ**
Cuba • 9-0-0 (8 KOs)

**3** **ERISLANDY LARA** ◆◆
U.S. • 32-3-3 (19 KOs)

**4** **CONOR BENN**
U.K. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)

**5** **TROY ISLEY**
U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)

**6** **ETINOSA OLIHA**
Italy • 22-0-0 (10 KOs)

**7** **AARON MCKENNA**
Ireland • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)

**8** **AUSTIN WILLIAMS**
U.S. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)

**9** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
U.K. • 35-4-0 (25 KOs)

**10** **JESUS RAMOS JR.**
U.S. • 24-1-0 (19 KOs)

### JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS*

**C** **(VACANT)**

**1** **VERGIL ORTIZ**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (22 KOs)

**2** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** ◆
U.S. • 23-1-1 (15 KOs)

**3** **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)

**4** **BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** ◆
Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)

**5** **XANDER ZAYAS** ◆
Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)

**6** **JARON ENNIS**
U.S. • 35-0-0 (31 KOs)

**7** **BRANDON ADAMS**
U.S. • 26-4-0 (16 KOs)

**8** **ABASS BARAOU** ◆
Germany • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)

**9** **SERHII BOHACHUK**
Ukraine • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)

**10** **BAKARY SAMAKE**
France • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)

### WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS*

**C** **(VACANT)**

**1** **DEVIN HANEY** ◆
U.S. • 33-0-0 (15 KOs)

**2** **BRIAN NORMAN JR.**
U.S. • 28-1-0 (22 KOs)

**3** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
Lithuania • 16-1-0 (9 KOs)

**4** **GIOVANI SANTILLAN**
U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)

**5** **ROHAN POLANCO**
Dom. Rep. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)

**6** **SHAKHRAM GIYASOV**
Uzbekistan • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)

**7** **ALEXIS ROCHA**
U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)

**8** **RAUL CURIEL**
Mexico • 17-0-1 (14 KOs)

**9** **JACK CATTERALL**
U.K. • 32-2-0 (14 KOs)

**10** **MARIO BARRIOS** ◆
U.S. • 29-2-2 (18 KOs)

### JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS*

**C** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** ◆◆
U.S. • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)

**1** ▲+6 **DALTON SMITH** ◆
U.K. • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)

**2** ▼-1 **RICHARDSON HITCHINS** ◆
U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)

**3** ▼-1 **ALBERTO PUELLO**
Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (10 KOs)

**4** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
U.S. • 32-1-0 (11 KOs)

**5** **GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL** ◆
U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)

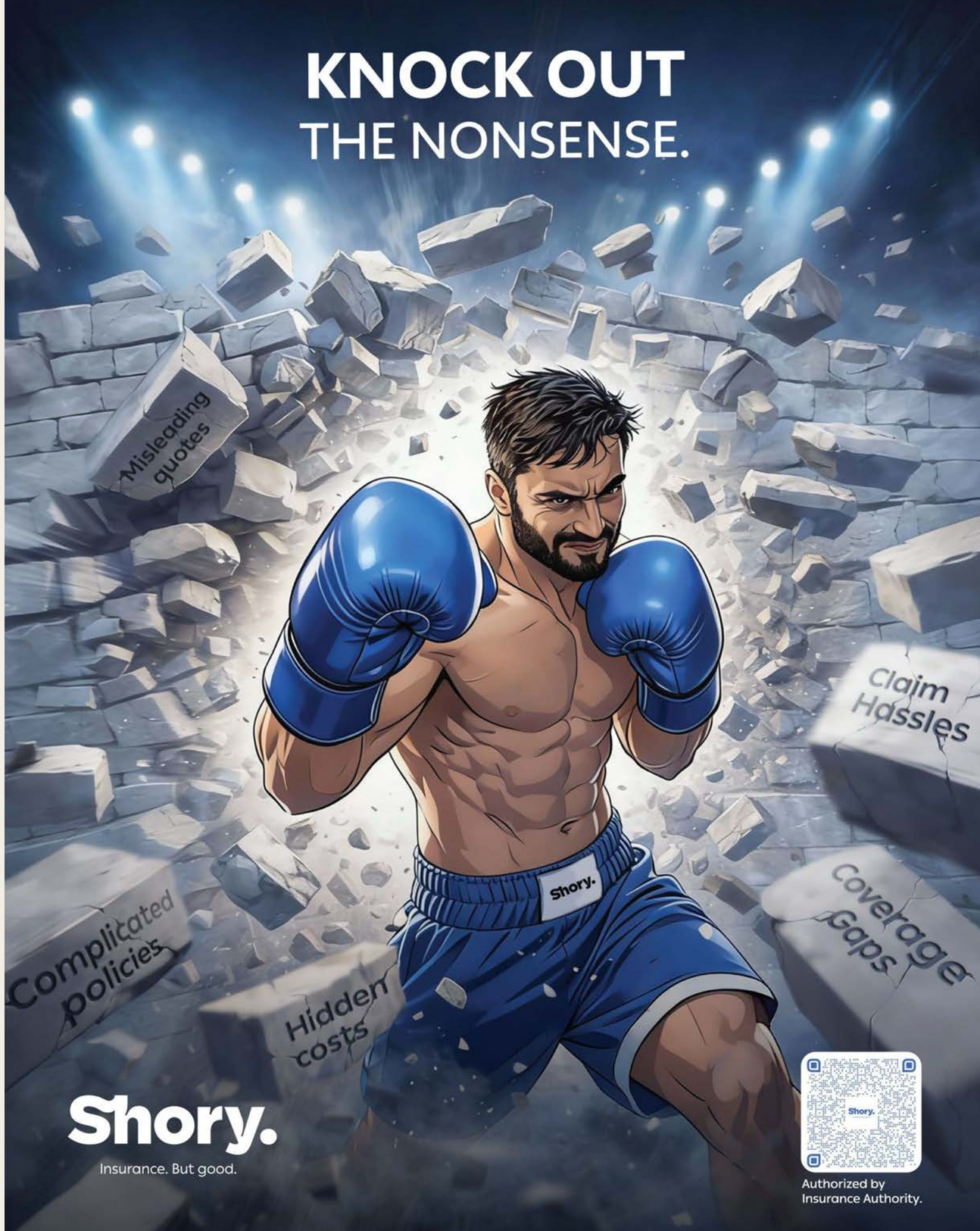
**6** **SANDOR MARTIN**
Spain • 43-4-0 (15 KOs)

**7** ▼-5 **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
Puerto Rico • 23-3-0 (22 KOs)

**8** **ADAM AZIM**
U.K. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

**9** **LINDOLFO DELGADO**
Mexico • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

**10** **ANDY HIRAOKA**
Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)

# MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Jan. 17, 2026

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

## LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**

**1 SHAKUR STEVENSON** ◆
U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)

**2 GERVONTA DAVIS**
U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)

**3 RAYMOND MURATALLA** ◆
U.S. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)

**4 WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
Mexico • 33-1-0 (27 KOs)

**5 ANDY CRUZ**
Cuba • 6-0-0 (3 KOs)

**6 ABDULLAH MASON** ◆
U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)

**7 FLOYD SCHOFIELD**
U.S. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

**8 DENYS BERINCHYK**
Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)

**9 SAM NOAKES**
U.K. • 17-1-0 (15 KOs)

**10 LUCAS BAHDI**
Canada • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

## JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**

**1 O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** ◆
U.S. • 24-3-0 (12 KOs)

**2 EMANUEL NAVARRETE** ◆
Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)

**3 ANTHONY CACACE**
Ireland • 24-1-0 (9 KOs)

**4 EDUARDO NUNEZ** ◆
Mexico • 29-1-0 (27 KOs)

**5 ROBSON CONCEICAO**
Brazil • 20-3-1 (10 KOs)

**6 EDUARDO HERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)

**7 CHARLY SUAREZ**
Philippines • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)

**8 RAYMOND FORD**
U.S. • 18-1-1 (8 KOs)

**9 JAMES DICKENS** ◆
U.K. • 36-5-0 (15 KOs)

**10 RYAN GARNER**
U.K. • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)

## FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**

**1 RAFAEL ESPINOZA** ◆
Mexico • 28-0-0 (24 KOs)

**2 ANGELO LEO** ◆
U.S. • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)

**3 NICK BALL** ◆
U.K. • 23-0-1 (13 KOs)

**4 STEPHEN FULTON**
U.S. • 23-2-0 (8 KOs)

**5 LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ**
Mexico • 32-3-0 (19 KOs)

**6 BRUCE CARRINGTON**
U.S. • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

**7 BRANDON FIGUEROA**
U.S. • 26-2-1 (19 KOs)

**8 MIRCO CUELLO**
Argentina • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)

**9 RA'EESE ALEEM**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)

**10 DAYAN GONZALEZ**
Cuba • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)

## JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS*

**C NAOYA INOUE** ◆◆◆◆◆
Japan • 32-0-0 (27 KOs)

**1 MARLON TAPALES**
Philippines • 41-4-0 (22 KOs)

**2 MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**
Uzbekistan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)

**3 SAM GOODMAN**
Australia • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)

**4 ★ JUNTO NAKATANI**
Japan • 32-0-0 (24 KOs)

**5 ▲+3 SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 20-1-0 (18 KOs)

**6 ▲+1 RAMON CARDENAS**
U.S. • 27-2-0 (15 KOs)

**7 ▼-3 ALAN PICASSO**
Mexico • 32-1-1 (17 KOs)

**8 ▼-3 SHABAZ MASOUD**
U.K. • 15-0-0 (4 KOs)

**9 SUBARU MURATA**
Japan • 10-0-0 (10 KOs)

**10 BRYAN MERCADO VAZQUEZ**
Mexico • 32-1-0 (26 KOs)

## BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**

**1 SEIYA TSUTSUMI** ◆
Japan • 13-0-3 (8 KOs)

**2 CHRISTIAN MEDINA** ◆
Mexico • 26-4-0 (19 KOs)

**3 TAKUMA INOUE** ◆
Japan • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)

**4 RYOSUKE NISHIDA**
Japan • 10-1-0 (2 KOs)

**5 DAIGO HIGA**
Japan • 21-3-3 (19 KOs)

**6 ANTONIO VARGAS**
U.S. • 19-1-1 (11 KOs)

**7 JOSE SALAS** ◆
Mexico • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

**8 YOSHIKI TAKEI**
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)

**9 ★ KAZUTO IOKA**
Japan • 32-4-1 (17 KOs)

**10 ▼-1 RIKU MASUDA**
Japan • 9-1-0 (8 KOs)

## JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS*

**C JESSE RODRIGUEZ** ◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

**1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ**
Argentina • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)

**2 ▲+1 DAVID JIMENEZ**
Costa Rica • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)

**3 ▲+1 PHUMELELA CAFU**
S. Africa • 11-1-3 (8 KOs)

**4 ▲+1 TOMOYA TSUBOI**
Japan • 3-0-0 (2 KOs)

**5 ▲+1 ANDREW MOLONEY**
Australia • 28-4-0 (18 KOs)

**6 ▲+1 RICARDO MALAJIKA**
S. Africa • 17-2-0 (12 KOs)

**7 ▲+1 WILLIBALDO GARCIA** ◆
Mexico • 23-6-2 (13 KOs)

**8 ▲+1 RENE CALIXTO BIBIANO**
Mexico • 24-1-1 (10 KOs)

**9 ★ ISRAEL GONZALEZ**
Mexico • 31-5-2 (12 KOs)

**10 ★ THEOPHILOUS ALLOTEY**
Ghana • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

## FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**

**1 RICARDO SANDOVAL** ◆◆
U.S. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)

**2 ▲+2 MASAMICHI YABUKI** ◆
Japan • 19-4-0 (18 KOs)

**3 ▲+3 ANTHONY OLASCUAGA** ◆
U.S. • 11-1-0 (8 KOs)

**4 ▼-1 SEIGO YURI AKUI**
Japan • 22-3-1 (12 KOs)

**5 GALAL YAFAI**
U.K. • 9-1-0 (7 KOs)

**6 ▲+1 ANGEL AYALA**
Mexico • 18-1-0 (8 KOs)

**7 ▲+2 TOBIAS REYES**
Argentina • 18-1-1 (16 KOs)

**8 FELIX ALVARADO**
Nicaragua • 42-5-0 (35 KOs)

**9 ▲+1 JUKIYA IIMURA**
Japan • 9-1-0 (2 KOs)

**10 ★ JOSELITO VELAZQUEZ**
Mexico • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)

## JR. FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**

**1 ▲+2 RENE SANTIAGO** ◆◆
Puerto Rico • 15-4-0 (9 KOs)

**2 ▼-1 CARLOS CANIZALES**
Venezuela • 28-3-1 (20 KOs)

**3 ▲+1 THANONGSAK SIMSRI** ◆
Thailand • 39-1-0 (34 KOs)

**4 ▼-2 KYOSUKE TAKAMI**
Japan • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)

**5 SHOKICHI IWATA**
Japan • 15-2-0 (2 KOs)

**6 REGIE SUGANOB**
Philippines • 17-1-0 (6 KOs)

**7 CRISTIAN ARANETA**
Philippines • 25-3-0 (20 KOs)

**8 ERIK BADILLO**
Mexico • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)

**9 MASATAKA TANIGUCHI**
Japan • 21-5-0 (15 KOs)

**10 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA**
S. Africa • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)



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# MEN'S RING RATINGS

Through Jan. 17, 2026 | CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

## STRAWWEIGHTS

*WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS*

**C** **OSCAR COLLAZO** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

**1** **MELVIN JERUSALEM** ◆
Philippines • 25-3-0 (12 KOs)

**2** **PEDRO TADURAN** ◆
Philippines • 19-4-1 (13 KOs)

**3** **RYUSEI MATSUMOTO**
Japan • 7-0-0 (4 KOs)

**4** **SIYAKHOLWA KUSE**
S. Africa • 9-3-1 (4 KOs)

**5** **JOEY CANOY**
Philippines • 24-5-2 (15 KOs)

**6** **TAKESHI ISHII**
Japan • 11-1-0 (8 KOs)

**7** **YUNI TAKADA**
Japan • 16-9-3 (6 KOs)

**8** **VIC SALUDAR**
Philippines • 27-6-0 (17 KOs)

**9** **BEAVEN SIBANDA**
Zimbabwe • 9-1-0 (3 KOs)

**10** **JOSEPH SUMABONG**
Philippines • 9-1-0 (4 KOs)

## HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

*RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM*

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

## POUND FOR POUND LIST

### MEN

**1** **OLEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)

**2** **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 32-0-0 (27 KOs)

**3** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

**4** **DMITRY BIVOL**
Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

**5** **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)

**6** **JUNTO NAKATANI**
Japan • 32-0-0 (24 KOs)

**7** **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)

**8** **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
U.S. • 31-0-0 (25 KOs)

**9** **DEVIN HANEY**
U.S. • 33-0-0 (15 KOs)

**10** **OSCAR COLLAZO**
U.S. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

### WOMEN

**1** **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)

**2** **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (3 KOs)

**3** **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 22-2-0 (5 KOs)

**4** **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)

**5** **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 48-4-1 (31 KOs)

**6** **GABRIELA FUNDORA**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)

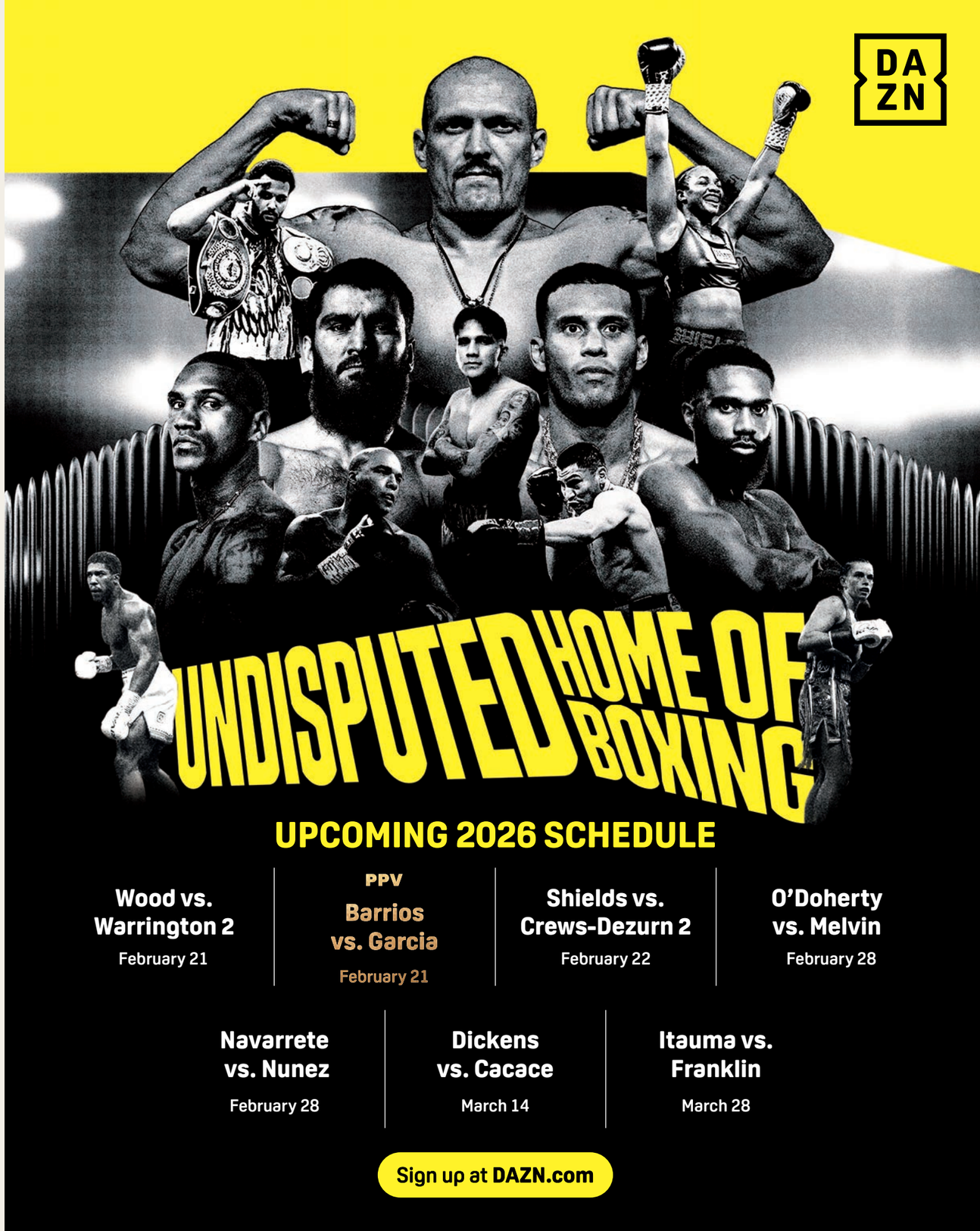
**7** **DINA THORSLUND**
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)

**8** **LAUREN PRICE**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)

**9** **YOKASTA VALLE**
Costa Rica • 34-3-0 (10 KOs)

**10** **ELLIE SCOTNEY**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (0 KOs)





# WOMEN'S RING RATINGS Through Jan. 17, 2026

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

## SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS*

**C SHADASIA GREEN** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
**1 FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** ◆◆
U.S. • 10-2-0 (2 KOs)
**2 SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
**3 LANI DANIELS**
New Zealand • 11-3-2 (1 KO)
**4 MARY CASAMASSA**
U.S. • 6-1-0 (1 KO)
**5 VANESSA LEPAGE-JOANISSE**
Canada • 8-2-0 (2 KOs)

## MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**
**1 DESLEY ROBINSON** ◆◆
Australia • 11-3-0 (3 KOs)
**2 MELINDA WATPOOL**
Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
**3 TAMM THIBEAULT**
Canada • 4-0-0 (3 KOs)
**4 ★ KAYE SCOTT** ◆
Australia • 5-1-1 (0 KOs)
**5 ★ OLIVIA CURRY**
U.S. • 6-3-0 (1 KO)

## JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS*

**C. (VACANT)**
**1 MIKAELA MAYER** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 22-2-0 (5 KOs)
**2 OSHAE JONES** ◆
U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)
**3 FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
**4 MARY SPENCER**
Canada • 10-3-0 (6 KOs)
**5 PRISCILLA PETERLE**
France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

## WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS*

**C LAUREN PRICE** ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
**1 MIKAELA MAYER** ◆
U.S. • 22-2-0 (5 KOs)
**2 SANDY RYAN**
U.K. • 8-3-1 (3 KOs)
**3 STEPHANIE AQUINO**
Puerto Rico • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
**4 NATASHA JONAS**
U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
**5 MICHAELA KOTASKOVA**
Czech Rep. • 11-0-2 (4 KOs)

## JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS*

**C KATIE TAYLOR** ◆◆◆◆
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)
**1 CHANTELLE CAMERON** ◆
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)
**2 AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 48-4-1 (31 KOs)
**3 SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
**4 FLORA PILI**
France • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
**5 ELIZABETH OSHOBA**
Nigeria • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

## LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS*

**C. (VACANT)**
**1 CAROLINE DUBOIS** ◆
U.K. • 12-0-1 (5 KOs)
**2 ELIF NUR TURHAN** ◆
Turkiye • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
**3 TERRI HARPER** ◆
U.K. • 16-2-2 (6 KOs)
**4 BEATRIZ FERREIRA**
Brazil • 8-1-0 (2 KOs)
**5 ★ STEPHANIE HAN**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (3 KOs)

## JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS*

**C ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** ◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 17-1-0 (7 KOs)
**1 LEILA BEAUDOIN**
Canada • 13-2-0 (2 KOs)
**2 DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 50-3-0 (20 KOs)
**3 JENNIFER MIRANDA**
Spain • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
**4 MEA MOTU**
New Zealand • 23-1-0 (10 KOs)
**5 ★ BERNICE FERREIRA**
S. Africa • 9-0-0 (4 KOs)

## FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS*

**C AMANDA SERRANO** ◆◆◆
Puerto Rico • 48-4-1 (31 KOs)
**1 SKYE NICOLSON**
Australia • 15-1-0 (3 KOs)
**2 TIARA BROWN** ◆
U.S. • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
**3 NINA MEINKE** ◆
German • 20-3-0 (4 KOs)
**4 SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
**5 DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
Argentina • 32-6-3 (12 KOs)

## JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS*

**C ELLIE SCOTNEY** ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 11-0-0 (0 KOs)
**1 YAMILETH MERCADO**
Mexico • 24-4-0 (5 KOs)
**2 SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
**3 MAYELLI FLORES ROSQUERO** ◆
Mexico • 13-1-1 (4 KOs)
**4 ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 18-2-1 (4 KOs)
**5 NAZARENA ROMERO**
Argentina • 14-1-2 (8 KOs)

## BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS*

**C DINA THORSLUND** ◆
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
**1 CHERNEKA JOHNSON** ◆◆◆◆
Australia • 19-2-0 (8 KOs)
**2 ▲+1 SHURRETTA METCALF**
U.S. • 15-5-1 (2 KOs)
**3 ▲+1 FLORENCIA JUAREZ**
Argentina • 13-1-0 (1 KO)
**4 ▲+1 JOHANNA WONYOU**
France • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
**5 ★ TIAH MAI AYTON**
U.K. • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)

## JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS*

**C MIZUKI HIRUTA** ◆◆
Japan • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
**1 GINNY FUCHS**
U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
**2 ADELAIDA RUIZ**
U.S. • 17-1-1 (8 KOs)
**3 CARLA MERINO**
Argentina • 16-3-0 (4 KOs)
**4 EMMA DOLAN**
U.K. • 8-0-0 (1 KO)
**5 JASMINE ARTIGA**
U.S. • 15-0-1 (7 KOs)

## FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS*

**C GABRIELA FUNDORA** ◆◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
**1 KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
**2 ARELY MUCINO**
Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
**3 JASMINA ZAPOTOCZNA**
U.K. • 10-1-0 (0 KOs)
**4 MARILYN BADILLO AMAYA**
Mexico • 19-1-1 (3 KOs)
**5 DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 36-4-1 (5 KOs)

## JR. FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**
**1 EVELIN BERMUDEZ** ◆◆◆
Argentina • 22-1-1 (8 KOs)
**2 LOURDES JUAREZ** ◆
Mexico • 39-4-0 (5 KOs)
**3 GABRIELA ALANIZ**
Argentina • 18-2-0 (7 KOS)
**4 SARA BAILEY**
Canada • 6-1-0 (0 KOs)
**5 YESICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 30-3-0 (3 KOs)

## STRAWWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**
**1 YOKASTA VALLE** ◆
Costa Rica • 34-3-0 (10 KOs)
**2 SARAH BORMANN** ◆
Germany • 21-1-0 (7 KOs)
**3 YUKO KUROKI** ◆
Japan • 25-9-2 (10 KOs)
**4 KIM CLAVEL** ◆
Canada • 22-2-0 (3 KOs)
**5 SOL BAUMSTARH**
Argentina • 14-7-1 (8 KOs)

## ATOMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS*

**C (VACANT)**
**1 SUMIRE YAMANAKA**
Japan • 9-1-0 (3 KOs)
**2 CAMILA ZAMORANO**
Mexico • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
**3 ▲+1 ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS**
Mexico • 11-0-1 (1 KO)
**4 ▼-1 ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 8-2-1 (1 KO)
**5 NAO UGAWA**
Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)



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PROSPECT WATCH:

# Omari Jones

**By Manouk Akopyan**

Who's the next face of American boxing?

It's a question many are asking, especially after Terence Crawford announced his retirement from the sport at the end of last year.

In order to fit the description, the fighter must possess the perfect blend of ability and marketability – a prolific jab, preferably paired with a promotable gab, much like Floyd Mayweather Jr. did in the generation before.

One candidate who believes he has the ingredients to be in the mix as the next flag bearer is 2024 Olympic bronze medalist and undefeated junior middleweight Omari Jones.

Jones (4-0, 4 KOs), a 23-year-old prized prospect from Orlando, Florida, turned pro last year after his decorated amateur career. The aggressive boxer-puncher with fleet feet and a telegenic smile signed with Matchroom Boxing USA once Eddie Hearn made an aggressive push for the rights to promote him.

After finishing each of his four wins by stoppage inside three rounds in 2025, including two in his hometown, Jones believes he can be a force moving forward.

"I had an amazing 2025 campaign," Jones told The Ring. "It couldn't have gone any better to start my career. I need to keep winning against the right opponents and win the belts, and ultimately, I can be a face for American boxing in the near future. We'll get there eventually on God's timing. My career is going to be a special one."

Melina Pecaro

Currently leading the stateside pack in the post-Crawford era are pound-for-pound-ranked stars like David Benavidez, Shakur Stevenson, Devin Haney and Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez. Outside of the P4P list are known commodities and top draws such as Teofimo Lopez Jr. and Ryan Garcia, while the likes of Keyshawn Davis, Jaron Ennis, Vergil Ortiz and Richardson Hitchins wait in the wings.

Jones will have to jockey for position with the up-and-coming likes of Abdullah Mason, Bruce "Shu Shu" Carrington, Emiliano Vargas, Ernesto Mercado and Curmel Moton to represent the USA in the coming years, just like he did during the 2024 Summer Games in Paris.

Jones' Olympics run ended after dropping a split decision to eventual gold medalist Asadkhuja Muydinkhujaev of Uzbekistan. But Jones is proud of his accomplishment as the only American medalist at the last games, even though he wasn't in the primary position on the stand.

"It was the best moment of my life to see myself on the podium, to live out the dream that I wrote down and prayed about for a long time," said Jones. "Right now, nothing has topped that moment, and I am just proud that I was able to represent my country."

Hearn swayed Jones from contemplating another run for the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles by courting him in person, in Paris, immediately after the games concluded.

"It just showed that Eddie wanted me to be a part of Matchroom more than anybody else," said Jones. "Signing with Matchroom was one of the best decisions I made in my life. It was one of the biggest and scariest steps that I took … I believe they can make me a superstar. I have a great work ethic. We're going to go to great places, with the way I act, the way I carry myself. With all of those attributes together, I can be the next superstar."

Jones said he's been preparing for the grand stage ever since he first picked up a pair of boxing gloves at the age of 8. Soon afterward, he was enthralled by the Olympic journeys of Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard, Roy Jones Jr. and Mayweather, and he studied the all-time

**Jones captured bronze at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.**

**In his second professional bout, Jones stopped William Jackson in one.**

greats in hopes of creating a similar path for himself.

"I traveled to 13 countries in three years with USA Boxing," said Jones. "They gave me a huge platform to showcase my talent, and I ended up fighting in front of 15,000 people in the Olympics. I've been built for the big moments that I'm heading for."

Jones shows that he's well beyond his years outside of the ring as well. He's already penned a book, The Journey of an Olympian, and has invested in the next generation through his eponymous foundation by leading toy drives and coaching camps around the Orlando area.

"I love staying close to home with my family and community," said Jones. "It's a source of motivation to see them every day."

Jones still lives in Orlando and trains nearby at the School of Hard Knocks with head coach Jason Galarza. He also has a business sense, as evidenced by the clothing line he's launched and the business degree he's earned from Valencia College.

As the evolution from prospect to contender continues, Jones is on his way to graduating to eight-rounders this year.

"I'm looking to get more rounds under my belt and continue improving on my performances, but I'm not complaining about getting these guys out of there quickly either. The less punishment you take, the better," said Jones.

"I want to set a tone with the level of opponents I take on so the challenges show the trajectory that I want to work toward. I train hard, and when the lights come on, I perform."

While the luster of headlining in locales like Las Vegas and New York still inspires fighters as the calling card of reaching boxing's pinnacle, Jones is looking to put on for his city in addition to the country.

"I can absolutely be a franchise-like draw in Orlando," he said. "My ultimate goal is to sell out the arena where the NBA's Orlando Magic play. Once I develop into superstardom, there is going to be a whole new wave of Omari Jones fans for years to come." RING

THE BEST OF 2025

# FIGHTER OF THE YEAR: TERENCE CRAWFORD

BY DAVID GREISMAN

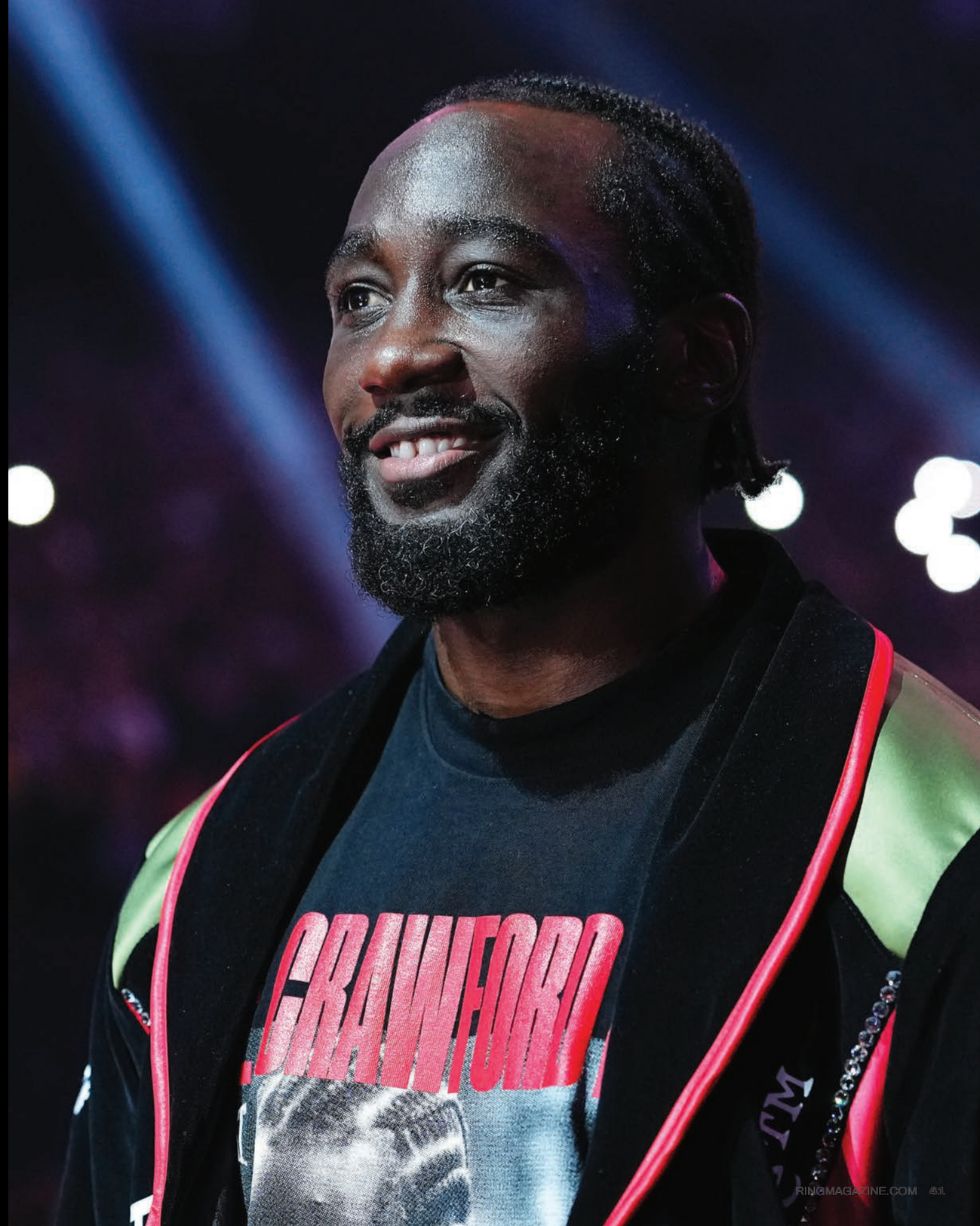
**It is rather uncommon for a boxer** to be named Fighter of the Year after winning just one match during the 12 months in question. But it is even rarer for a fighter to accomplish a feat as stunning as what Terence Crawford did.

On one night in September, Crawford became the undisputed super middleweight champion. He dethroned Canelo Alvarez, who had ruled for nearly five years, and whose accomplishments had put him on the pound-for-pound list for more than a decade. Crawford moved up two weight divisions to face Canelo, but truly three weight classes beyond where "Bud" was at his best.

And he made it look easy.

We know it wasn't easy. If it were easy, then other super middleweights would have come close, would have at least posed some kind of challenge to Canelo.

But that wasn't what titleholders Callum Smith, Billy Joe Saunders, Caleb



Even on the inside, Crawford more than held his own with power punches.

Plant and William Scull were able to do. Nor could ranked competitors John Ryder, Jaime Munguia and Edgar Berlanga. Another fighter who moved up in weight to try Canelo, then-undisputed junior middleweight champ Jermell Charlo, lost a one-sided decision. David Benavidez was the most viable contender in the division, someone who fans and observers saw as a threat. Apparently Canelo did as well; Benavidez ultimately left the weight class, unable to land a fight.

Crawford was not like the other super middleweights, however. He wasn't even really a 168-pounder. Yes, there was the fact that he stood 5-foot-9, slightly taller than Canelo, though a height advantage hadn't made a difference for the others. In every other way, Crawford was seen as the smaller man, moving up yet again after being the Ring champion at 135, undisputed at 140 and 147, and winning a belt at 154. Why would he be able to succeed where others had failed?

"All the odds are stacked against me," Crawford told The Ring's Tom Gray ahead of the match. "I'm the smaller guy coming up in weight. He's the bigger guy who's been knocking out bigger guys. To win a fight that people don't think you're capable of winning means everything."

Why would he be able to succeed? Precisely because he was not like the other super middleweights.

Because Terence Crawford is the complete package, a superlative all-around fighter with an overflowing abundance of skills and smarts, technique and talent.

Because he adds to that ridiculously formidable combination by finding extra motivation, much as Michael Jordan did. He is driven by slights, a nitro booster added to the fuel tank of an already high-performing vehicle.

Because Crawford is not just determined, but consumed by a need to prove his doubters wrong and himself right. He not only wants to win – he *has* to win, and he has the ability to do exactly what is necessary for victory.

"When I set my sights on doing something and I know what I'm capable of, it's not like a surprise to me," Crawford said afterward. "It's a surprise to y'all because y'all didn't believe me. But for me, I knew I could do it and I believed that I could do it. I just needed the opportunity."

Crawford scored clean shots on the bigger man throughout the fight.

What does it take to beat Canelo? Well, the Mexican superstar had lost just twice before – and only to two other greats. He was good but young, merely 23 when Floyd Mayweather topped him in 2013 at junior middleweight. He wasn't so much outsized as he was outboxed by light heavyweight titleholder Dmitry Bivol in 2022. Others had come close, sometimes controversially so: Erislandy Lara at 154, Gennadiy Golovkin twice at 160.

No one at 168. Not until Crawford. Not until that one night in September.

"I knew I had Canelo when I asked for the fight," Crawford said on former opponent Shawn Porter's podcast. "You know how people say, 'Oh, well he must see something.' What I see is him fighting Lara, him fighting Caleb Plant, him fighting Mayweather, him fighting Bivol, all those styles – I'm capable of doing all those in one – and how frustrated that those fighters had him. I just knew my style was all bad for him."

The first three rounds at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas were slower in action but a high-skills chess match in actuality, tactical but tense. Crawford commanded the pace and the distance, not overly mobile but not very hittable either. Canelo wisely targeted the body, given that little else was available. If Canelo had even a glimmer of success, Crawford usually responded.

Crawford furthered that approach in the fourth, letting loose with a combination after a solo shot from Canelo. He also wanted Canelo to retaliate, which would give Bud more chances to walk him into shots or catch him with counters. Canelo did land a few clean right hands in the round. None of them seemed to shake or otherwise concern Crawford, though

**If Crawford remains retired, this is one of boxing's greatest mic drops.**

a blow just before the bell pushed him back and drew a shake of the head and a smile.

"People said that he was going to knock me out in like three rounds and I was too small," Crawford said on Cam Newton's *4th&1* show. "I looked at that as disrespectful. I've never been dropped. Never been knocked out before. So what makes you think that I was going to get knocked out [against Canelo]? I think people was disrespecting my skills just because Canelo is an all-time great. But like I said before, he hadn't fought no Terence Crawford yet."

Canelo did have a better fifth round. In general, throughout the fight, he might land a good shot here or there, but his success was never sustained, never turned the tide. He kept trying to take control but could never actually regain, never mind remain, in control.

Still, Crawford felt it necessary around the midway point to impose his will in order to keep the fight from seesawing back and forth. He wanted to show that he was the boss, whether inside or outside – a message he sent clearly by standing and trading with Canelo in the seventh round. It was a demonstration from one man, demoralization for the other.

Crawford was confident he could avoid, block or roll with most of Canelo's shots, and that he could withstand those that landed cleanly. But just because he could win at Canelo's fight didn't mean he should fight Canelo's fight for the remaining rounds.

"I just felt like I was stronger, I punched harder, and I could've just stood in there and really like let 'em go. But you gotta follow the plan," Crawford said later in September on *The Art of Ward* with Andre Ward, one great super middleweight champion talking to another. "You gotta execute the plan, and the plan was to get in, get out, box in spurts, bang in spurts, and then once he want to fight, you move around a little bit."

Canelo took the eighth. Again in the ninth, Crawford entered exchanges with Canelo and got the better of them. By the 10th round, Canelo knew he needed something big. He couldn't be reckless either.

"He was trying to be competitive, but he respect my power, and he respect my boxing ability," Crawford said at the post-fight presser. "And I think what was frustrating him the most is, all his big shots I was blocking and catching and countering."

Indeed, when Crawford sent out a nice counter left in the 10th, Canelo needed to slip and roll with it. In the 11th, Crawford dished out an extended combination and then moved. Canelo retaliated with a lead left uppercut paired with a right cross. The signature moment of the round, however, may have been when Crawford feinted to the body and instead directed a jab upstairs. Canelo looked away after, either in disbelief or disgust.

The 12th also belonged to Bud, which proved the difference on the scorecards. With two rounds to go, judges Tim Cheatham and Max DeLuca had things even at 95-95 while Steve Weisfeld saw Crawford narrowly ahead, 96-94. Crawford's final six minutes earned him a unanimous decision, the scores close but the outcome inarguably clear, 115-113 (twice) and 116-112.

The win was his. The championship was his. This award is his as well.

Remarkably, for all of Crawford's achievements, this is his first time as The Ring's Fighter of the Year. Crawford has long believed he deserved more credit than he received, whether from fans, journalists or the various organizations and publications that issue awards.

"I felt as if I should've won the Fighter of the Year award when I beat [Errol] Spence," Crawford told Ward during the 2025 interview. "I felt like I should've won the Fighter of the Year award when I became undisputed [in 2017]. They didn't give it to me when I became undisputed, but they gave it to [Vasiliy] Lomachenko; he didn't become undisputed [...] They gave it to [Oleksandr] Usyk when he was undisputed. "They gave it to [Naoya] Inoue when he became undisputed. But Terence, they didn't give it to him.

"It was a little biased," Crawford added. "They say, 'Oh, he fought one time,' but look who I fought and look what I did to him. What I did to Spence, none of them other fighters can compete. He was ranked number five in the pound-for-pound list. I'm beating people that's on the pound-for-pound list."

Crawford makes a good point – he himself was rated third in this publication's pound-for-pound list going into the summer 2023 fight with Spence, who at number four was even better than Crawford recalled. Crawford's surprisingly one-sided dissection of Spence was, at the time, the biggest moment of his career. He added the three remaining alphabet belts at welterweight and became undisputed in his second weight division.

Yet that year, The Ring and the Boxing Writers Association of America favored Inoue, who knocked out Stephen Fulton and Marlon Tapales, winning all four junior featherweight world titles in five months to start his reign at 122.

In 2017, Crawford stopped the once-beaten Felix Diaz and then demolished Julius Indongo in three rounds to unify the final two belts at junior welterweight and become undisputed. Lomachenko, selected Fighter of the Year by The Ring and the BWAA, defended his title at 130 pounds by making Jason Sosa, Miguel Marriaga and Guillermo Rigondeaux quit.

**"I THINK PEOPLE WAS DISRESPECTING MY SKILLS JUST BECAUSE CANELO IS AN ALL-TIME GREAT. BUT LIKE I SAID BEFORE, HE HADN'T FOUGHT NO TERENCE CRAWFORD YET."**

Crawford did get the nod from the BWAA in 2014, when he traveled to Scotland and outpointed Ricky Burns for his first world title, stopped the previously undefeated Yuriorkis Gamboa and took a wide decision over Ray Beltran for the vacant Ring lightweight championship. This magazine opted for Sergey Kovalev based on his three wins: less for the KOs of Cedric Agnew and Blake Caparello and more the shutout of Bernard Hopkins to add two additional world titles.

As prestigious an honor as earning Fighter of the Year may be – it's clearly important enough to fuel Crawford's ire – a boxer's legacy is defined by the entirety of their run. And Crawford's legacy is truly definitive.

He is one of the best of this era. He went 20-0 in title fights. He was ranked on the pound-for-pound list for a decade, and at or near the top of the list for almost all of that stretch.

He is one of the best ever. He is one of just five men to be undisputed in three weight classes, according to boxing writer and historian Cliff Rold. The others were all-time greats Bob Fitzsimmons, Tony Canzoneri, Barney Ross and Henry Armstrong. Crawford is also one of only three men to be lineal champion in four divisions. The others were all-time greats Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao.

He capped his run by being the best of 2025. And he's going out on top.

In December, Crawford announced his retirement at the age of 38 after three decades in the sport, including 15 years as a pro. Some would say he's leaving prematurely, when he's at his most marketable after years of striving for that status. Some would counter that he's leaving at exactly the right time. What more could motivate Terence Crawford after jumping multiple weight classes to take down the true super middleweight champion?

Anyone who thought the Canelo fight was solely a money grab must have failed to recognize that competitiveness, not just compensation, is Crawford's main driver. He just wants to be compensated properly in the process. He wasn't sent out with a golden parachute. He retired with his biggest win in his biggest payday. This was a golden rocketship. This was a crowning achievement.

"Beating Canelo is going to be worth more than the bag at the end of the day, because I'm going to be talked about when I'm dead and gone," Crawford told Newton. "Hundred years, they gonna be like, 'Man, you remember that kid from Omaha, Nebraska, Bud Crawford, he went up two divisions, matter of fact three divisions, and beat Canelo Alvarez.' My name is gonna be talked about when I'm dead and gone. That's what legacy is about." RING

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*David Greisman, who has covered boxing since 2004, is on X @FightingWords2. David's book, "Fighting Words: The Heart and Heartbreak of Boxing," is available on Amazon.*

THE BEST OF 2025

# FEMALE FIGHTER OF THE YEAR: MIZUKI HIRUTA

BY DOUG FISCHER

IT'S been said that attention is the new currency in this digital age of social media and information-saturation, and it certainly holds true for professional boxing.

Boxers who garner attention from fans and media are often paid more and given more opportunities than those who don't. Ryan Garcia, who is still more of an influencer than a world-class boxer almost 10 years into his pro career, is a prime example.

Mizuki Hiruta isn't an influencer or social media sensation, but the colorful junior bantamweight champion is one of those genuinely flamboyant boxers that command attention in and out of the ring. She turns heads before the bell with her bright smile, hot-pink hair, elaborate – sometimes anime-themed – ring outfits and unbridled enthusiasm. But Hiruta also holds attention during her fights thanks to the fast, fluid and flashy skills she displays.

A good old-school reference for Hiruta's boxing style and brand of exuberance is Hector Camacho Sr. The prime "Macho Man" was a dynamic left-hander with a flair for showmanship and creative ring attire not unlike the 29-year-old southpaw from Okayama, Japan. Thankfully, Hiruta doesn't share Camacho's lack of discipline or self-destructive tendencies.

But like Camacho, Hiruta's stylishness and gregarious personality

Hiruta takes it to Gloria Gallardo, her third of four bouts in 2025.

Lina Baker; (Inset) Naoki Fukuda

Naoki Fukuda

**Hiruta made short work of veteran Ji Hyun Park in 2024.**

are authentic. It's who she is. It's not an act to promote her fights or gain social media followings.

There's a difference between wanting attention and a desire to stand out. Hiruta (10-0, 2 KOs) – "Mimi" to her friends and teammates – is all about the latter. She isn't interested in the kind of "currency" that Garcia wields. She wants to earn her place among the elite women boxers. However, it's a safe bet that Hiruta will grow her fan base as she continues to build her legacy.

"Her charisma definitely catches people's eyes," said Tom Loeffler, who signed her to his 360 Promotions in late 2024.

Hiruta's activity and dominance caught the eyes of hardcore fans and boxing insiders last year. If she hasn't caught your eye yet, she'll probably ensnare you this year.

Her 2025 campaign – which consisted of four WBO title bouts and two defenses of the Ring Magazine belt she won in May – resulted in this publication's Fighter of the Year honors and set up bigger fights for higher stakes.

"The plan for 2026 is to capitalize on the success she had last year," Loeffler told The Ring. "She's clearly No. 1 in her division. She's No. 1 on BoxRec. She's a Ring champ, which is something you really have to earn. Mizuki was just a Japanese phenom prior to last year, but now there's more American and international awareness about her after fighting four times in California – all broadcast on UFC Fight Pass, which has a global audience.

"Her ratings were very high on Fight Pass, especially from Japan. And the reception from the fans in California was encouraging. She's a big [Shohei] Ohtani fan, [Yoshinobu] Yamamoto is from her hometown, and with the Dodgers winning the World Series, Los Angeles and Japanese sports fans were on a high prior to her fourth bout of 2025.

"She ended the year with a much higher profile. The presentation of her Ring belt got a lot of notice. She was well received at the WBO convention in Bogota, Colombia. She traveled on her own to Riyadh to support her countrymen, [Junto] Nakatani and [Naoya] Inoue, on December 27. So, step by step, she's getting to be one of the better-known women boxers."

The goal of 2026 is for Hiruta to share the ring with one of her better-known peers. Loeffler mentioned The Ring's 2024 Female Fighter of the Year, undisputed flyweight champion Gabriella Fundora.

"Fundora would be a huge fight," he said. "There are great names at flyweight who could come up to





challenge [Hiruta], but [Fundora] is the best of them. I've heard rumors of [former undisputed strawweight champ and junior flyweight titleholder] Seniesa Estrada getting back into the gym. I'm not saying she's announced a comeback, but you never know. I've got a lot of respect for Seniesa. She used to fight on Gennadiy Golovkin's and [Roman Gonzalez's] undercards. That's a superfight we'd welcome. "

Hiruta's respected trainer, Manny Robles, believes future glory awaits at bantamweight – after she collects a couple more 115-pound belts.

"Our goal is to unify," said Robles, a 2025 Trainer of the Year nominee who also trains 2025 Upset of the Year winner Armando Resendiz. "Adelaida Ruiz recently won the WBC belt and she's from Los Angeles, so that would be a good Southern California fight. Jasmine Artiga has the WBA belt; she's unbeaten.

"Or maybe, if the unification bouts can't be made soon enough, we move up to 118. There's [Ring Magazine champ] Dina Thorslund. There's [unified titleholder] Cherneka Johnson. There's great fighters in the heavier weight classes, but we'll leave that to Tom."

Loeffler mentioned the possibility of a homecoming bout for Hiruta.

"She's getting offers to fight back in Japan," he said. "Japanese boxing is experiencing a surge right now."

That's an understatement, but not entirely true when it comes to the women's side of the sport. Hiruta had the talent and amateur background to grab her first world title only 14 months and four bouts into her pro career, but she soon hit the glass ceiling.

Hiruta won the vacant WBO belt with a unanimous decision over Kanako Taniyama in December 2022 but was limited to only one bout in 2023 and 2024 – stoppages of Casey Croft (TKO 1) and decorated Korean veteran Ji Hyun Park (TKO 6). The inactivity didn't sit well with Hiruta, but she knew it wouldn't change if she remained in Japan.

The promotional team she belonged to, Misako Promotions, lacked the financial backing to put on more shows or the international profile and influence to pull in top-rated junior bantamweight challengers. Hiruta knew she would have to leave home if she wanted to emulate the achievements of her countrymen.

Witnessing the success of Junto Nakatani, who is trained by an American coach in Los Angeles, and knowing that the Inoue brothers and Kenshiro Teraji have occasionally held mini-camps in Southern California, Hiruta began looking to do the same in 2023.

**"SHE'S CLEARLY NO. 1 IN HER DIVISION. SHE'S NO. 1 ON BOXREC. SHE'S A RING CHAMP, WHICH IS SOMETHING YOU REALLY HAVE TO EARN."**

She did so with the blessing of Takashi Misako, her promoter and owner of her home gym in Japan. If she could find an American trainer, maybe she and Misako – who would act as her manager outside of Japan – could also partner up with an American promoter.

They targeted Rudy Hernandez, who trains Nakatani and has longstanding ties to the Japanese boxing scene, and Robles, who was recommended by Japanese boxing journalist Yuriko Miyata. Misako reached out to Miyata, who lives in Southern California and had recently helped facilitate Teraji's visit. That contact set in motion actions that would eventually result in Hiruta's breakout year.

"I knew who Mizuki was because of her amateur accomplishments and how fast she won her first world title, but I met her in person on her 27th birthday, April 12, 2023, when she visited L.A. for her first training camp outside of Japan," said Miyata.

"Her manager asked me if I could help Mizuki find a good gym and trainer. I let her stay at my house and introduced her to Manny. I thought he was the best choice for her because I thought she needed to develop her inside work and offense technique. She agreed."

Robles fondly recalls meeting and working with Hiruta for the first time.

"Yuriko made the introduction, and Mimi said she'd like to have a mini-camp to see if we got along," he said. "We hit it off right away. She's a great personality. Humble. Hardworking. She got on well with the other coaches and fighters at the gym, too. She's got a great relationship with everyone because she livens everything up and puts us in a great mood. If she wasn't a fighter, she could be a comedian. She's very funny. But she works hard and enjoys her work. She's very competitive – she doesn't like to come in second – but she sets a good example for the others."

There was instant chemistry with Robles, but landing a promoter wouldn't happen overnight.

"I talked to several promoters, including Tom and 360, about an opportunity for her to sign with them," said Robles, "but most of them, except for Tom, were not interested or [were] unsure about her."

Loeffler has experience representing world-class foreign talent in the U.S., having promoted Hall of Famers in Golovkin and the Klitschko brothers, Vitali and Wladimir, as well as future Hall of Famers Gonzalez and Cecelia Braekhus. However, he wasn't immediately sold on the idea of promoting Hiruta.

"Promoting Hiruta wasn't outside of my wheelhouse, because I specialize in international fighters, but I'd never promoted a female fighter from Japan," said Loeffler. "I promoted [Naoya] Inoue's U.S. debut and one of Kazuto Ioka's fights, but those were one-offs and both fighters were far more experienced than Hiruta.

**Hiruta won The Ring's 115-pound title by outpointing Carla Merino.**

Lina Baker

"It was a unique situation with Hiruta. She was already a world champ when Manny told me about her, but she only had five fights at the time. And she was not on my radar because she had only fought in Japan. I had been involved in the careers of other female fighters in the past – Laila Ali, Lucia Rijker and later Braekhus, but they were in the heavier weight classes. I trusted Manny's recommendation, but I needed to do some research and come up with a strategy."

In the meantime, Hiruta focused on getting her work visa while using her visitor visa to continue traveling to Robles' gym for training camps. Loeffler would make up his mind the moment he met Hiruta in person.

"The timing couldn't be better," recalled Robles. "She was training with me while I was getting [junior middleweight contender] Serhii [Bohachuk] ready for Brian Mendoza [in March 2024]. I took her with me and Team Bohachuk to Las Vegas because it was the perfect opportunity for me to make the introduction to Tom, who promotes Serhii. They met at the fight-week press conference, and as soon as Tom and his crew saw her in person, their eyes lit up. They loved her personality, her energy and fashion sense. She made a great first impression."

Loeffler signed Hiruta, 6-0 at the time, and made plans for a busy 2025. Her U.S. debut was originally set to be her WBO mandatory challenger, Carla Merino, in the first quarter of the year. However, given that her last bout – the first-round blowout of Park – had been in January 2024, Loeffler lobbied the WBO to allow for a rust-shaking tune-up bout against journeywoman Maribel Ramirez.

Hiruta dropped the well-traveled Mexican veteran in the second round en route to an eight-round technical decision after the fight was stopped due to a cut Ramirez suffered from an accidental headbutt. The bout took place at the Commerce Casino in January, in front of a raucous Mexican-American crowd – there to support East L.A.'s Omar Trinidad, who was in the main event – but she captivated the audience.

Four months later, Hiruta returned to Commerce to take on Merino, The Ring's No. 2-rated junior bantamweight at the time. She outclassed the respected Argentine contender over 10 rounds, showcasing everything that made her The Ring's No. 1-rated junior bantamweight – steely focus, hand and foot speed, balance, feints, timing, distance control, accurate combinations and block-and-counterpunching technique. The unanimous decision victory made Hiruta the first Ring Magazine 115-pound champion from Japan.

"I am so happy and relieved with this win," Hiruta told Miyata afterward. "I was worried about [fighting Merino], maybe a little afraid of her. Even my team was nervous. I expected a tough and tactical fight, and we prepared for everything. Now I keep going forward.

"I will keep The Ring belt forever. I'll never let anybody snatch this from me."

Two defenses followed: a lopsided unanimous decision over unbeaten Naomy Cardenas in August and a shutout against former title challenger Gloria Gallardo in November.

Hiruta was the most active female champion in 2025, giving her the edge over future Hall of Famers Katie Taylor and Mikaela Mayer, unified Ring champ Ellie Scotney and unified beltholder Evelin Bermudez for The Ring's Fighter of the Year award.

Robles is proud of Hiruta, but he knows better performances for bigger prizes lie ahead – in part because his pupil wants more from herself.

"She's got a chip on her shoulder," he said. "She's not satisfied. She wants to knock her opponents out. She was disappointed that she didn't get the KO against Gallardo. She wants to please the fans. She understands she has to entertain to become a bigger name."

Hiruta will earn attention the old-fashioned way, and whatever currency comes from it will be reinvested into the sport.

"She wants to stay busy," said Robles. She's a true champion. She wants the best, wants to unify, wants to go up in weight and challenge the champions there."

THE BEST OF 2025

# THE RING AWARD WINNERS 2025

1

## 1 FIGHT OF THE YEAR

### CHRIS EUBANK JR. UD 12 CONOR BENN

April 26, Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, London • Middleweight Non-Title Bout

The most potent feud in British boxing history was rekindled when Chris Eubank Jr. and Conor Benn faced off in a super-hyped showdown for family bragging rights. Eubank's speed and technical skill carried the day early, but Benn managed to drag his rival into a high-contact shootout. All expectations were exceeded in a classic pitched battle, which culminated in one of the most memorable closing rounds in recent times. Benn would even the score in their November rematch with a points win of his own.

2

## 2 KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

### BRIAN NORMAN JR. KO 5 JIN SASAKI

June 19, Ota-City General Gymnasium, Tokyo • WBO Welterweight Championship

Japan's Jin Sasaki was unbeaten in nine outings since suffering his only loss to countryman Andy Hiraoka in 2021. However, defensive frailties remained, which meant trouble against a big puncher. Norman, in his second title defense, won every round before cleaning house with a spectacular left hook that knocked Sasaki unconscious on impact. The referee dispensed with the count and immediately called for medics.

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## 3 TRAINER OF THE YEAR

### SHINGO INOUE

It's impossible to overstate the quality of Shingo Inoue as a coach. The Japanese guru has transformed his sons into elite-level players in their respective divisions and made one of them a pound-for-pound superstar. In 2025, Shingo oversaw Naoya's four successful defenses of the undisputed junior featherweight title and laid out the game plan for Takuma to become a two-time bantamweight world champion at the expense of the previously unbeaten Tenshin Nasukawa.

## 4 UPSET OF THE YEAR

### ARMANDO RESENDIZ SD 12 CALEB PLANT

May 31, Michelob Ultra Arena, Las Vegas • Super Middleweight Non-Title Bout

For the heavily favored Caleb Plant, this fight was simply a prelude to bigger things. For Armando Resendiz, it was an opportunity to kick the door open. Never underestimate the power of motivation. Mexico's Resendiz was a prohibitive underdog but would not be denied in his biggest fight. He threw more punches, landed more punches and held his own when it came to physical strength. This was a split decision victory that should have been unanimous.

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## 5 ROUND OF THE YEAR

### SEIYA TSUTSUMI VS. DAIGO HIGA

February 24, Ariake Arena, Tokyo WBA Bantamweight Championship Round 9

Over four years after they'd fought to a draw in a non-title bout, Japan's Seiya Tsutsumi was defending a world title against countryman Daigo Higa. Cut around the right eye entering the ninth, Tsutsumi was on the ascent when he was suddenly dropped by a catch-and-shoot left hook. Desperate to close the show, Higa followed up furiously, slamming home shots to the head and body. Tsutsumi had recovered from the knockdown and was biding his time, however. With less than a minute remaining in the round, the champion decked Higa with an explosive right-hand counterpunch that deposited him face-first on the canvas in a neutral corner. The challenger survived that sensational round and, incredibly, the bout ended in another tie.

5

## 6 PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

### EMILIANO VARGAS

Record: 16-0 (13 KOs) Junior Welterweight

With impressive skills, two-handed punch power and a legendary bloodline, Emiliano Vargas looks destined for stardom. The son of two-time junior middleweight champion Fernando Vargas scored three knockouts in 2025, with none of those opponents making it out of Round 2. Vargas, 21, closed out the year with a dominant points triumph over Jonathan Montrel in what was his first scheduled 10-round bout. Big things are expected from "El General," who is the youngest of three boxing brothers being guided by their father. RING

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# THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

**OLEKSANDR USYK** HAS NOTHING LEFT TO PROVE AS HE ENTERS THE ENDGAME OF HIS BOXING CAREER, AND YET HE STILL SEARCHES FOR ANY CHALLENGES THAT REMAIN

**By Michael Rosenthal**

The end of Oleksandr Usyk's extraordinary career is in sight.

The small heavyweight who became a giant in the sport over the past several years seems to be as good as ever at 39 – he's a unified champion and No. 1 pound-for-pound, after all – but he has said that two or three more fights will complete his body of work, meaning the boxing wizard's last battle will likely take place

**In two fights, Usyk's class and volume punching overcame Tyson Fury's size and strength.**

next year.

The big question is this: Who will be his final opponents? There is no obvious answer beyond his desire to face Deontay Wilder early this year.

Usyk became an all-time great during a six-fight run between September 2021 and last July, in which he defeated Anthony Joshua (twice), Daniel Dubois, Tyson Fury (twice) and then Dubois again, essentially cleaning out the division's biggest names.

The remaining pool of potential foes is shallow, including the likes of Wilder and several young big men who are talented but relatively unproven. The latter group doesn't appeal to Usyk or his team, although that could evolve.

"You never know," said Egis Klimas, Usyk's longtime manager. "Everything changes."

Why Wilder?

It isn't complicated. One, he's a former long-reigning world titleholder whose punching power makes all of his fights interesting. He's a known quantity worldwide. And, two, he's from the United States, where Klimas said the fight will take place if negotiations between the parties culminate in an agreement.

Usyk (24-0, 15 KOs) hasn't fought in the U.S. since his heavyweight debut, a seventh-round knockout of Chazz Witherspoon in Chicago. His other seven heavyweight fights have taken place in the United Kingdom, Poland (which borders his native Ukraine) or Saudi Arabia.

The former undisputed cruiserweight champion wants to conquer America. And the 40-year-old Wilder (44-4-1, 43 KOs) is the biggest name among heavyweights in the U.S., warts and all. He's 2-4 in his last six fights and unranked by The Ring.

"I've been interested in stepping into the ring with Deontay for a long time," Usyk told The Ring through a translator. "And I don't agree that this is weak opposition. He is a powerful boxer who deserves this opportunity. I really want to fight in the United States and put on a big show for the American audience. The last time I fought in the USA was in 2019, but it wasn't a major event; it was just my heavyweight debut.

"So when we asked ourselves what I still haven't done, where there is still unclaimed territory, the answer was obvious."

Klimas didn't want to provide details about the Usyk-Wilder talks, which are ongoing, but he was clearly optimistic.

"It's in the works," he said. "Is it going to happen? I can't say. It's fair to say that it's the fight Team Usyk wants."

And assuming Usyk gets and wins that fight, as expected, then what?

Agit Kabayel, ranked No. 2 by The Ring and the WBC interim beltholder, is unbeaten (27-0, 19 KOs) and has victories over Frank Sanchez and Zhilei Zhang. He's gaining respect. However, when Usyk was asked about a potential matchup with the 33-year-old German, he wouldn't even go there.

"I treat everyone with respect and goodwill, including Agit," he said. "But please don't ask me right now about specific names or long-term plans. My team and I are focused on the fight with Wilder. After that – we'll see."

Klimas' assessment of Kabayel as a prospective opponent: "No. He needs to do something special."

The boxing world is excited about gifted 21-year-old Moses Itauma, a big puncher from England who some see as the next dominant heavyweight. However, his impressive first-round stoppage of Dillian Whyte in August is his only victory of note. His resume is thin.

"I can say the same about Itauma," Usyk said in early January. "Moses is a boxer with great potential. But at the moment, he isn't even a contender. In January, he will fight Jermaine Franklin. [Editor's note: This bout was later pushed back to March 28.] From a boxing perspective, I am ready for any opponent. But fights are the result of many factors: negotiations between teams, promoters, organizers and sanctioning bodies."

Klimas agreed: Itauma (13-0, 11 KOs) isn't ready.

"He's never been in deep waters," he said. "He's never been tested. … Everybody thinks highly of him, but at this point he's not in a position to face Oleksandr. Maybe in a year or so. Who knows? Let him prove it. Let him work for it."

Another possibility is Ring No. 1 Fabio Wardley, an Englishman whose rise from white-collar boxing to WBO world titleholder is a compelling story.

Wardley (20-0-1, 19 KOs) delivered a stunning, career-changing upset when he knocked out former world titleholder Joseph Parker in the 11th round of a fight he was losing to become the WBO's interim titleholder last October. He was elevated to full champion the following month when Usyk gave up the belt – and thus lost his undisputed champion status – rather than face Wardley.

That tells you all you need to know about Usyk's interest in taking on Wardley, at least at the time. There IS a scenario that could lead to that matchup or one more meeting with a former rival.

Wardley has made it clear that he would face Usyk next if it were up to him, but he's also intrigued with the possibility of facing Fury, the former

**Daniel Dubois was stopped both times he mixed with the Ukrainian legend.**

two-time world champ who has begun training for a comeback at 37. In fact, both men have expressed interest.

If Wardley were to defeat Fury, Klimas said, he would be seen differently by Team Usyk. And, of course, a trilogy would make sense if the 6-foot-9 Fury were to win. The Usyk-Fury fights were competitive, particularly the first one, which Usyk won by split decision.

"We'll see what happens with Fury's comeback," Klimas said. "If Fury beats Wardley, I can see Oleksandr fighting for the undisputed championship again. They had two fights and neither was a stoppage. Tyson believes he won the first fight, both fights. It would be a huge trilogy fight. That fight would make a lot of noise in the U.K.

"Fury and Wardley for the WBO title makes sense," Klimas went on. "They both fight under one roof, under one promoter (Frank Warren). The fight will be easy to make. If Fury wins that fight, he's the champion again. All doors are open. And, yes, if Wardley wins, that puts him on another level. That puts him on the map."

**Usyk has reigned as undisputed champ three times in two divisions.**

These are the uncertain waters Usyk is navigating as he begins to contemplate life after boxing. The only thing he knows with certainty is that he's not quite finished.





Why only two or three more fights? He chose those numbers not because he believes he has no more to give but because he wants to spend more time with those closest to him. Make no mistake: He feels strongly that he could fight on indefinitely.

Indeed, he turned 39 on January 17 but doesn't feel as if he has lost a step. He is known to be disciplined not only in the weeks leading to fights but year round, which preserves his body. Klimas said his client has to gain weight in his training camps, not lose weight. And while he had more than 300 fights in a stellar amateur career – including an Olympic gold medal in 2012 – he has had only 24 as a pro, a small number even by today's standards.

He's about as fresh as anyone can be in his position.

"If we're talking about how I feel physically, my condition, my desires, I could have more [than two or three more fights]," he said. "But every fight means months of preparation, and I also want to spend time with my family, to see my children grow up. So that number is kind of a compromise between the professional and personal parts of my life.

"I have only positive feelings about my age. I have become wiser and more experienced, but I haven't lost my hunger for life or for boxing. I haven't lost my shape either, because I work on it constantly. And my team works on it as well – our scientists, coaches, nutritionists, and doctors. In my life, everything is still ahead, with God's help and blessing."

And, of course, there's the obvious question: What motivates him after an already legendary run through the top of boxing's most demanding division? He has no shortage of that fuel.

Let's start with the inevitable doubters he has encountered along the way. Those who have followed his career will remember that many believed a former 200-pounder couldn't compete with modern behemoths like Fury and Joshua, who were taller and outweighed him by significant margins.

We know what happened there. And the doubters played a role. They always will.

**"IF FURY BEATS WARDLEY, I CAN SEE OLEKSANDR FIGHTING FOR THE UNDISPUTED CHAMPIONSHIP AGAIN."**

"Listen, at one point in time, people told me, 'You're weak. Don't box,'" he said. "Then they said, 'Don't move up to heavyweight. You're too small. You can't overcome your physical limitations. You won't beat all those big guys.' Every time, I proved them wrong.

"Now they say, 'You're too old for boxing. You won't overcome your age. It's biology.' So now my challenge is to prove that age can be beaten too."

Then there's the old proverb, "The journey is more important than the destination." Usyk is honored by the accolades he has received, but, he said, he's less motivated by the rewards – including money – than the process. In other words, he enjoys boxing.

"I don't consider myself an all-time great," he said when told that he IS one. "I don't think about myself in those terms at all. Pride is a path that leads to a fall. Love is my strongest motivator. Love for boxing, because I truly love this sport. Love for my country and the desire to continue representing it at the highest level of sport. Love for God and gratitude that he continues to give me the strength to do what I love. So that means I must keep going."

He then became more philosophical, combining Bushido (the Japanese samurai code) with religion to explain his approach to the sport.

"For a samurai, the most important thing is the path itself," he said. "Boxing is like art: If you are a true artist, you create because you simply cannot do otherwise. And if you devote yourself to your work properly, the Lord rewards you with achievements.

"Christ told his disciples the Parable of the Talents. A master, before leaving on a journey, entrusted his property to three servants: To one he gave five talents (a "talent" referring to a large unit of money); to another, two; to the third, one – each according to his ability. The first two put the money to work and multiplied it, while the third buried his talent in the ground. When the master returned, he praised and rewarded those who had multiplied what was entrusted to them and condemned the lazy servant, taking the talent away from him.

"God gives everyone a talent and expects you not to bury it in the ground. That is why I keep boxing for as long as I have the strength."

Or, as Klimas put it: "What is he going to do? He doesn't want to sit on the couch and watch TV. He wants to be active."

Now we must wait to see what road he takes. A realistic three-fight scenario seems to be Wilder in the first half of the new year, an interim fight later (perhaps in the fall) and then the winner of a fight between Wardley and Fury sometime in 2027.

If Usyk gets and wins those fights – and then walks away, as he said he would – he will have replicated Terence Crawford's remarkable accomplishment of retiring as an undefeated, undisputed champion who, if the current order holds, is also No. 1 pound-for-pound.

Again, Usyk isn't motivated by such things. At the same time, the prospect of going out in that fashion isn't lost on him.

"I will go out at the top," he said. "But not today." RING

# DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK

**TYSON FURY** HOPES TO CONTINUE THE LONG TRADITION OF VETERAN CHAMPS RESUMING THEIR CAREERS AFTER BACK-TO-BACK LOSSES TO THE SAME NEMESIS

**by Don Stradley**

For many boxing fans, the final bell had already tolled on Tyson Fury's career. After consecutive defeats to Oleksandr Usyk, his January 2025 retirement was met with scant fanfare; the appetite for a third fight with Usyk was nonexistent outside Fury's imagination. The epic run seemed logically and definitively over for "The Gypsy King." But now, as whispers of high-profile clashes with his domestic rivals grow ever louder, Fury is poised to join a unique club: the former champion returning not just from a loss, but from back-to-back defeats to the same man. Such circumstances are difficult to bounce back from, and only the best can endure these double disasters and add to their legacy.

It's not that Fury looked awful against Usyk. His legendary toughness was still on display, as was his boxing acumen. Fury did as well as a boxer can do while losing. Yet there was something missing from him in those two losses. Though Fury boxed well in the early going, the Ukrainian dominated the late rounds in both fights. When Fury needed to rally in the final rounds, he was like a tired, old circus bear.

Fury apparently wants another moment in the spotlight, even as his critics shout that Usyk revealed his limitations. Yet

even the most cynical anti-Fury types would concede that fights with countrymen Fabio Wardley, Daniel Dubois and young phenom Moses Itauma would still be a major U.K. spectacle. Of course, the biggest U.K. boxing event of all time would be a showdown with Anthony Joshua, but the tragic car accident that claimed the lives of two of the former unified titleholder's teammates in December puts that matchup, and maybe Joshua's career, in question. However, even if it's Fury vs. Wardley, Dubois or Itauma, we can still envision a packed stadium, state-of-the-art pyrotechnics, an air show of giant blimps and maybe a few songs from Fury during the ring walk. He might even be the sentimental favorite. The question will be, as it has always been in these cases: Can Fury overcome those two stains on his record and regain some of his glory? Or do the two losses mean he's reached the end of the road?

Larry Holmes once found himself in a situation that mirrored Fury's. A long-reigning heavyweight champion, Holmes was 35 and 36 when he lost back-to-back close bouts to Michael Spinks. The comparison is

**(Left) Michael Spinks outworked a faded Larry Holmes and edged him twice. (Above) Sonny Liston scored two first-round stoppages over Floyd Patterson.**

even more striking when you consider that Holmes had looked bad in his bout prior to those losses, a close 15-round decision win over Carl Williams, just as Fury looked horrendous against Francis Ngannou.

Bitter even in the best of times, Holmes was especially crabby after the losses to Spinks. He laid low for more than a year until Don King coaxed him to challenge the new heavyweight champ, Mike Tyson. Undertrained, rusty and only doing it for the money, Holmes succumbed to Iron Mike in four rounds.

Three years later, Holmes returned to the ring and embarked on an unlikely but admirable comeback. Lacking youth, he compensated with pure guile, confidence and ring savvy, compiling a respectable 21-3 record after the three consecutive defeats. Admittedly, he became a nostalgia act, fighting in second-rate casinos and failing in two more title bids. Still, his skill was evident as he outboxed the likes of Ray Mercer, Jesse Ferguson, Jose Ribalta and, in his final fight at age 53, Eric "Butterbean" Esch. Holmes publicly portrayed himself as a happy-go-lucky mercenary simply fighting for money, going as far as his left jab could take him. Yet beyond the persona, it's possible Holmes wanted his final moments in the ring to be a celebration of his talents. For someone with Holmes' ego, the losses to Spinks (and Tyson) weren't good notes on which to end a career.

Holmes' experience wasn't as bad as what another heavyweight champion, Floyd Patterson, endured in the early 1960s. In consecutive bouts with Sonny Liston, Patterson suffered devastating first-round knockout losses and became the butt of jokes in news columns around the country. Yet Patterson, who wasn't yet 30, was more resilient than anyone realized. Over the next two years, he mounted a strong comeback, highlighted by a decision win over George Chuvalo that was chosen as The Ring's Fight of The Year for 1965. Though he fell short when he challenged Liston's own two-time conqueror, Muhammad Ali, Patterson remained active. During this later period, Patterson's popularity was greater than when he'd been champion. Considered a pampered and protected fighter in his younger days, now he'd become a sort of likable underdog. He finally retired in 1972, capping off his post-Liston years with a record of 17-4-1 and a newfound respect from boxing fans.

Middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins had made a record-setting 20 title defenses when he lost a pair of close bouts to Jermain Taylor in 2005. The losses left 40-year-old Hopkins in a sour mood, but he continued competing at the elite level, twice winning the Ring Magazine light heavyweight championship and later unifying 175-pound belts, all while defeating such names as Antonio Tarver, Winky Wright, Kelly Pavlik and Jean Pascal. He even avenged a loss from early in his career, outpointing old rival Roy Jones Jr. in a much-anticipated, though uneventful, rematch.

Like Patterson, Hopkins enjoyed an increase in popularity during this stage of his career. His age-defying vitality, his cagey boxing style and his prickly personality combined to make him a regular attraction on HBO, Showtime and pay-per-view events. While scoring wins over Tavoris Cloud, Karo Murat and Beibut Shumenov, it looked like B-Hop could go on forever. In the wake of his losses to Taylor, Hopkins posted a record of 9-4-1 with a no-contest before he retired at 51.

Of course, two years after his rematch with Hopkins, Taylor had his own double disaster courtesy of Pavlik. Unlike the aged Hopkins whom he dethroned for the middleweight title, Taylor was under 30 and was being groomed for stardom. Boxing programmers had liked his broad smile and clean-cut appearance, but consecutive losses to Pavlik (TKO 7 and UD 12) derailed him. His career after the Pavlik bouts included a couple of dramatic KO defeats, first to Carl Froch and then to Arthur Abraham, the latter part of the Super Six World Boxing Classic. After some time off, Taylor scored some wins and even won the IBF middleweight title by beating Sam Soliman in 2014. Unfortunately, a series of arrests and jail time ended Taylor's career. He was 6-2 after the losses to Pavlik but had become one of boxing's problem characters in the process.

Even the Baddest Man on the Planet had to deal with back-to-back losses to the same opponent. Following his knockout loss to Evander Holyfield and subsequent disqualification for biting Holyfield's ears in the rematch, Mike Tyson faced widespread public scrutiny and was stripped of his boxing license. He resumed his career roughly a year and a half later, but this marked the beginning of his most ridiculous period, during which his diminishing skills were often overshadowed by headline-grabbing behavior, including a failed drug

**Bernard Hopkins pushed Jermain Taylor hard but dropped two close decisions.**

test for marijuana following the Andrew Golota fight in October 2000. While he never fully regained his elite standing, his increasingly bizarre persona kept him relevant, securing him another title shot and several impressive paydays, arguably his primary objective during this phase. Including his loss to YouTuber Jake Paul in 2024, Tyson's record after the twin Holyfield losses is 5-4 with two no-contests. He didn't help his legacy, but the boxing world would've been duller without him.

It's not always a desperate bid for money that brings a fighter back after consecutive losses to the same opponent. Sometimes it's because he's still chasing greatness. Marco Antonio Barrera was a bright young star, having made eight defenses of his WBO junior featherweight title, when he lost by DQ to Junior Jones in 1996. DQ? No, Jones was battering Barrera when the Mexican star's trainer stepped into the ring to stop the fight, drawing the disqualification. Barrera lost to Jones again in 1997, this time by unanimous decision. Apparently, Jones had Barrera's number.

Rather than fade away, Barrera charged ahead into the featherweight class. He put the setbacks behind him and enjoyed an impressive career. After the Jones bouts, his ventures included his unforgettable trilogy with Erik Morales, plus significant victories over Naseem Hamed, Johnny Tapia, Kevin Kelley, Paulie Ayala and Rocky Juarez (twice). His stats were 24-5 after the twin failures against Jones, the latter part of his career ensuring his 2017 induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Shane Mosley was at the top of The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings, having gone undefeated in 38 bouts, when he unexpectedly dropped consecutive fights to Vernon Forrest. He rebounded with a close win over Oscar De La Hoya to take the junior middleweight title, then lost another two in a row, this time to Winky Wright. But Mosley wasn't done. The post-Winky era saw Mosley go 10-6-1 against some of the decade's best. This included two victories over Fernando Vargas, two over Ricardo Mayorga and his memorable TKO win over Antonio Margarito. Of course, late-period Mosley may be best remembered for nearly knocking Floyd Mayweather on his ass during their 2010 bout, when Mosley was nearly 40.

Going back in history, we come across the forgotten name of Virgil "Honeybear" Akins, a rangy, crowd-pleasing puncher. Akins won the welterweight title in June 1958 but lost it later in the year to Don Jordan via 15-round decision in Los Angeles. Akins had been a 3-to-1 betting favorite, so the title change was considered an upset. The rematch in Akins' hometown of St. Louis was a bruising contest. Again, the decision went Jordan's way.

After losing two in a row to Jordan, the 31-year-old Akins was in no position to retire. He'd always been a "ham and egger" working for short money, allegedly part of a stable managed by Blinky Palermo, a creepy character who was part of a Philadelphia crime family. And in a scenario as familiar to fighters as flat noses and sore knuckles, Akins also owed money to the Internal Revenue Service. Hence, Akins was boxing again within a few months. He worked steadily during the next three years but never made it back to the title scene. After the twin losses to Jordan, Akins was a meager 10-11-1. Citing eye problems, he retired in 1962.

Though he had a tune-up bout between them, Sugar Ray Robinson's two split decision losses to Paul Pender in 1960 were proof that he had finally reached the end. He was 39 years old with more than 150 fights to his credit, and he simply wasn't the boxer he'd once been. Pender, a good but not great fighter with a history of brittle hands, was in the right place at the right time to take Robinson's middleweight crown. When Robinson lost the rematch, it was the first time he had failed to win a rematch. That was a sure sign that things had changed irreversibly for the sweetest practitioner of the sweet science.

**Evander Holyfield prevailed in back-to-back wins over Mike Tyson.**

**Fury claimed he'd done enough to win both fights against Usyk.**

He looked good in his next bout, a 15-round draw with old rival and NBA middleweight titlist Gene Fullmer, but Robinson lost the rematch with Fullmer as well. He seemed bound for retirement. Yet with the IRS hounding him, Robinson fought on for nearly five more years. With only a flicker left of his old brilliance, he followed the Pender losses by amassing a record of 30-11-4 with a no-contest. Some of his victims included Denny Moyer, Wilf Greaves and Ralph Dupas. He also took one last series of bouts in Europe, where he'd always been an attraction. Still, this last gallop around the track felt stale. By the time he retired in 1965, the boxing scene was more than ready to bid Robinson adieu.

Sometimes a champion gets whipped twice by the same guy and retires. He figures there's not much more he can give to the business, and that two whippings are a sign that it's time to quit. That's how it was for Henry Armstrong. He'd made 19 defenses of the welterweight title before Fritzie Zivic handed him horrendous beatings in October of 1940 and again in January of 1941, both times at Madison Square Garden. The second bout was the worst, with Armstrong bleeding like a stuck pig until the action was mercifully stopped at 0:52 of the 12th. Zivic couldn't have inflicted more harm on Armstrong if he'd come into the ring with a bayonet.

Armstrong retired and lived like a playboy for a while. He even tried his hand at managing a fighter. But boredom set in, along with a need for cash. Seventeen months after his second loss to Zivic, Armstrong restarted his career. He was only 29, but with more than 130 fights on his ledger, he was a war-torn 29. Yet he enjoyed a few more lucrative years in the ring – he often said he made more money during this era than when he had been a three-division champion – with wins over some good names of the time, including Tippy Larkin, Lew Jenkins, Juan Zurita, Sammy Angott, Bummy Davis and Mike Belloise. He even got some revenge against Zivic, outpointing him in San Francisco in 1942, when both were faded ex-champions trying to make a buck. During those later years, Armstrong even kept a young Ray Robinson on the run for 10 rounds, the younger, fleeter Robinson unwilling to slug with the old man and content to win on the move. Overall, "Homicide Hank" was 40-7-2 after the two losses to Zivic. That's a decent career for most fighters. For Armstrong, it was just his curtain call.

Fury is working in a different era. A fighter of his stature attains barbaric wealth for a single fight, the kind of payday Virgil Akins couldn't imagine. It isn't likely he'll take a lot of bouts in Mississippi just to keep the lights on. It's also unlikely that he'll keep performing at a high level for many more fights. Fighters such as Armstrong, Holmes and Hopkins were freakishly durable, but Fury's huge body isn't made for the long haul. Once reportedly ballooning to 400 pounds, with a history of substance abuse and a series of physically demanding fights in his past, Fury's future as a top competitor is limited.

To this observer, it appeared the biggest problem in his bouts with Usyk was that Fury's spark was gone. That internal drive that had made him so compelling in the past was dimmed. He'd always been more than just a big, awkward slapper – he'd had vast ring intelligence, a zeal for competition and just a touch of meanness. But against Usyk, those qualities were less apparent, and he became the big, awkward slapper his critics had always chided him for being. Sure, Usyk's skill and pressure had something to do with it, but so did Fury's age and long-abused body.

One more fight? It's possible. And if he looks good, perhaps a second one. If we've learned anything about The Gypsy King, it's that he does as he pleases. We don't have much say in the matter, even if the road's end is more visible than ever.

# SOCIAL SKILLS

ONLY 11 FIGHTS INTO HIS PRO CAREER, LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT PROSPECT **BEN WHITTAKER** HAS ALREADY GATECRASHED THE GLOBAL BOXING SCENE COURTESY OF A DAZZLING SKILL SET AND A COLOSSAL ONLINE FOLLOWING

**By Dom Farrell**

Matheus Cunha is an international soccer player for Brazil, the most successful nation in the history of the World Cup. He plays for Manchester United, the 20-time champions of England. Prior to his transfer to United for $83.5 million in June 2025, he excelled for another club in the English Premier League: Wolverhampton Wanderers – the local team of Tokyo Olympics boxing silver medalist and light heavyweight prosepct Ben Whittaker.

Following his fifth-round TKO of Khalid Graidia in February 2024, Whittaker was taking in a game at Wolves' Molineux Stadium when Cunha, who wasn't playing in the match, knocked on the window of a corporate hospitality box to get his attention.

"He goes, 'Brother, brother, can I have a photo?'" Whittaker recalls. "So I took a photo, we talked, and he left. I said to my brother, 'Who the hell was that, man?' He said his name, but

I didn't really clock it. I thought it was the waiter."

Whittaker laughs sheepishly at the absurdity of the situation. A Brazilian soccer star in the stadium where he is adored, essentially fanboying a local boxer who has no idea who he is. But Cunha had also been talking excitedly about the crucial third actor in this meeting of sporting worlds – Brazil boxing icon and former two-weight world titleholder Acelino "Popo" Freitas.

During the Graidia fight, Whittaker was admonished on several occasions by referee Sean McAvoy for his signature elaborate showboating. Quicksilver defensive skills were also on display, and an expected marking-time fight against a veteran French journeyman was suddenly a viral sensation. Among those to see Whittaker online and share approvingly was Freitas, who is still beloved by the boxing community in his homeland.

Whittaker is now aware of this, having established that Cunha is a fellow elite athlete and not a man hoping for a generous tip. "I found out that 'Popo' is one of the biggest Brazilian legends out there, and for him to post me and talk about me, it really raised my profile. I don't know if it's skin color or hair or texture, but for some reason a lot of the fans thought I was Brazilian, so that helped as well."

It paints a curious picture of how a modern sports star breaking into the public consciousness can look in the fragmented media landscape of 2026. The days of a boxer stopping traffic in Times Square might be gone for good, but a 28-year-old Englishman who has never fought in Brazil or competed against a Brazilian professionally now has a very solid online following in the sports-mad South American nation because a cult-hero from a couple of decades ago liked what he saw.

Whittaker has also captured attention in Japan and the United States, where he fights for the first time as a pro in March. The former can be partly attributed to his Tokyo silver medal, but mostly to Whittaker being immersed in the world of anime and posting about this on his socials. Eleven fights into a career in the paid ranks where the levels of achievement do not yet come close to his considerable pedigree, Whittaker is a lot of things to a lot of different people and fan bases. But one word comes up repeatedly: superstar.

"Because the broadcast structure and system has changed, the mainstream doesn't really exist anymore," says Eddie Hearn, who signed Whittaker to Matchroom Boxing in 2025, having come so close to snaring the blue-ribbon amateur in 2022 that a Matchroom promotional video had already been filmed when the fighter signed to Ben Shalom's Boxxer.

**Whittaker stopped Liam Cameron in the second round of their rematch.**

Although it might return, Sky Sports and its huge platform of linear television pulled out of boxing last year, but the riches on offer at the time were vast. "The money was mad," recalls Hearn. "Even I looked at the offer and went, 'I actually don't know how you turn that down.'

"What exists now is really virality and digital presence," Hearn continues. "The traditional mainstream is not necessarily your first choice of the market to hit. I want the digital mainstream and I want that age group.

"My daughter is 16. When I signed Ben Whittaker, she came up to me and she went, 'Oh my God, you've signed Ben Whittaker.' She'd never mentioned him before. 'Oh, he's sick'... that's the word she used. Because she'd seen the clips.

"If you look at his socials, it's completely different to anything you will see from any other fighter. Who produces content like that? And I'm not talking about in the ring. It could be stills. It could be promos. It could be anime. He's just developed this wonderful niche within the sport, and I'm so excited about the future. We haven't even had a real fight yet."

Whittaker had 3.7 million followers on Instagram in January 2026, a little more than Oleksandr Usyk and almost a million ahead of Terence Crawford. In the U.K., he's behind only Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury. The reel of his showboating performance against Graidia has 3.1 million likes. When Whittaker dished out a brutal first-round KO against the overmatched Benjamin Gavazi on his Matchroom debut, Hearn reported "huge" numbers, with social and digital impressions on par with the Chris Eubank Jr. (969,000 Instagram followers) vs. Conor Benn (2.3 million Instagram followers) rematch.

"It's out of my hands, to be fair. I'm just being myself," Whittaker says. "Even in that fight when I was on the ropes, doing this and that, spinning around, I didn't think, 'Oh, you know, I'm gonna get some likes and follows.' It was just me expressing myself, and I think the fans get that it's authentic. I'm not trying to force it."

All of this might make old-school hardcore fans shudder. All the flashy stuff is fine, but where are the accomplishments to back up the Olympic medal?

Referring back to the post-mainstream media age Hearn describes, fleeting attention is the most common currency. Those dealing in it might already have dismissed Whittaker as a style-over-substance pretender. Hearn speaks of the unbelievably driven, kind-hearted man of faith who he wants to bring to a wider audience over the coming months and years. And the fighter's flair under the spotlight should not obscure a man deeply immersed in a sport that gave him a purpose as a child.

"I went to a school where a lot of the kids get kicked out and stuff. I was diagnosed with ADHD, and I felt embarrassed because it was classed as a disability and I didn't want to be classed like that," he says. "But I said to myself, 'Look, do not be embarrassed.' For me, [ADHD is] like a superpower.

"For some reason, in the school classroom, I couldn't switch on. I was all over the place – here, there and everywhere. But if you can find something that you go into, your mind will just switch. Boxing was like my classroom. It's where I really focused. It's where I really switched on and turned on. It's my driving force. I think I'm a person who gives 100% or nothing. There's no in-between, and luckily it's boxing that I put it all into."

It's not a trait to package up for

a viral clip, but the boxing obsessive, steeped in the sport's lore, feels like the core of Ben Whittaker. In his third pro fight, a third-round TKO of Jordan Grant, he marked a new endorsement deal with sportswear giant Adidas by wearing leopard-print shorts, a nod toward the greatest showboater of British boxing, "Prince" Naseem Hamed.

Naz enjoyed a glowing, nostalgic reappraisal in his homeland during early 2026 when the movie Giant was released, documenting his career-shaping relationship with much-loved trainer Brendan Ingle. As such, Hamed seemed like an obvious conversation topic for a man seen as an heir of sorts, but Whittaker conceded he draws upon different influences.

"I'm a person who likes to do things that will make sense," he says. "It was my first fight with Adidas and I kept getting told there were resemblances: 'Oh, he fights like Naz.' So I thought just to get them talking again, let's do the leopard-print shorts. Let's bring them back. I did like that color.

"But stylistically, I've always been more of a purist fighter. I grew up watching the Pernell Whitakers, the Floyd Mayweathers, Andre Wards, all those fighters, so that's been my schooling. Funnily enough. My style is just me. I'd say I've got more influence from the Cuban fighters, if anything. I grew up watching people like Julio Cesar La Cruz, Mario Kindelan and Guillermo Rigondeaux."

Another one of boxing's celebrated schools will also underpin Whittaker's assault on top honors in the pro game. His godfather, Joby Clayton, guided Ben's decorated amateur career and is an advocate of the aggressive Kronk style developed by late trainer Emanuel Steward in Detroit. That admiration informed an early pro career union between Whittaker and Emanuel's nephew SugarHill Steward, but it ultimately fell apart due to logistical demands placed on the coach as the chief second for globetrotting heavyweight champ Tyson Fury.

**Trainer Andy Lee has unique insight as a former fighter himself.**

Clayton was back in Whittaker's corner by the time he flirted with disaster against tough Sheffield puncher Liam Cameron. He struggled for rhythm throughout his slot on the Artur Beterbiev vs. Dmitry Bivol undercard in October 2024, and the bout was close enough on the cards to be scored a technical draw after the pair, in a clinch, tumbled over the top rope and out of the ring in Round 5. An ankle injury meant Whittaker was unable to continue.

Accusations that he bailed out of a scrap against the rough-and-ready Cameron were hurtful, and Whittaker was booed to the ring by sections of the crowd for the April 2025 rematch in Birmingham. He took care of business inside two emotionally charged rounds, and there was another of Emanuel Steward's Detroit disciples giving the instructions.

"It was a compliment in itself really, him reaching out, because I know a lot of people want to go there," Whittaker says of Andy Lee, the former middleweight titleholder who was working as an analyst for DAZN on the night of the first Cameron fight and got in contact with the much-maligned fighter in the aftermath. "I went to Ireland to try him out. I was fortunate to try other coaches too, but we just clicked.

"For my whole career, I've kind of been schooled in the Kronk way, so it's not really out of my comfort zone. It's really just neatening things up, sharpening things up. He was a fighter himself, so you kind of listen a bit more because he's been there and done it.

"Andy does like my style. He loves how elusive I am, how fast I am, how skillful I am, and you don't really see a lot of light heavyweights like that. So you don't want to change that, but we are putting the emphasis on hitting hard. And if you can get them out of there, why make it go longer?

"That's what we showed in the last two fights: that these guys are at a certain level. If we can hurt them, get them out of there, do it. The old me would have messed around, done things for a showboat reel, and then it just gets long and dangerous because they're still trying to hurt you. So get them out of there where you can."

Whittaker's two outings under Lee so far have lasted a combined seven minutes and eight seconds, with Cameron and Gavazi obliterated in quicktime. Tougher challenges lie ahead, and Hearn's plan after a showcase appearance in America is a big domestic summer fight.

The 175-pound division is more stacked than almost any other in the U.K. Craig Richards, Dan Azeez, Willy Hutchinson, Lyndon Arthur, Zach Parker or even fellow Olympian Joshua Buatsi – the recipient of a generous decision win over Parker in his most recent outing – could all feasibly be names in the frame. "In January 2027, I want [Whittaker] to be ready to fight for the world title. Not just ready, but ready to win," Hearn says.

Fighter and promoter are certainly on the same page. "I look at my friend Dalton Smith," Whittaker adds, beaming with pride at the mention of his former Great Britain teammate who thrillingly dethroned WBC junior welterweight titleholder Subriel Matias in Brooklyn on January 10. "He's won a world title. He's hardly got any of my follows, but he's got what I want. That's what I'm chasing. The follows are nice, but the belt lives with you forever." RING

## THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

Ben Whittaker first came into the public consciousness in the U.K. under painful circumstances. Britain's light heavyweight hope at the Tokyo Olympics was distraught as he lost the gold medal bout to Cuba's Arlen Lopez, leaving the ring in tears.

The hurt was arguably compounded by the nationality of the man in the other corner. Whittaker is steeped in the Cuban style, and many of his fighting inspirations hail from the Caribbean boxing hotbed.

"When I was coming up, I used to watch everyone. I saw Jesse 'Bam' Rodriguez in the world championships. I watched Shakur Stevenson. I saw all these guys and I'd study them," he says. "Funnily enough, I got to that level, but the people I really used to study were Robeisy Ramirez and Julio Cesar La Cruz."

To Whittaker's surprise and delight, the admiration flowed both ways in the case of two-time Olympic gold medalist La Cruz. The 36-year-old claimed light heavyweight glory at Rio 2016 and was an Olympian alongside Whittaker in Tokyo, this time winning gold at heavyweight.

"I was out in Dubai or somewhere and Julio comes up to me and says, 'Ben, can I have a photo?' I was like, 'This is weird,'" he beams. "He said he was a fan and that he'd like to get some sparring, so we stayed in touch."

Unfortunately, both men's schedules have not lined up. The possibility of getting together around last year's World Boxing Championships in Liverpool did not come to fruition, although one of La Cruz's team passed on their man's number to Whittaker and a dream trip could be in the cards if dates line up in 2026.

"His coach said, 'We'd love to invite you to Cuba. We've got a big training camp; you can stay at our facilities.' Hopefully this year we can get something sorted, because that'll just be a bucket list thing, man, to go over to Cuba, train with someone that I grew up watching. It was a weird, full-circle moment where he came up to me. Weird but good."

Even though most of the talk regarding Whittaker opponents this year will revolve around the rich U.K. crop of light heavyweights, Lopez looms as both friend and foe. An itch to scratch as he continues to flit between the codes as a 6-0 professional.

"If I'm playing FIFA (the soccer video game) and someone beats me, I'm practicing in silence until I can get them back, you know what I mean? That's what I feel like," Whittaker adds. "I like Arlen Lopez, we follow each other on Instagram, we talk now and again. But in the back of my mind, I wanna get that back.

"I just feel like since Tokyo, I've become a whole different fighter. I'm a better boxer. I can hit harder, and I'm a bit more of a pro, whereas he's doing back and forth. I think that'll ruin his style a little bit. If I could, and it makes sense, sign me up, because it would be good to make it 1-1 instead of 1-0."

PROMOTER SNAPSHOT:

# SALITA PROMOTIONS

**By Adam Abramowitz**

"I've seen so many fighters that could have been world champions, but due to foolish and irresponsible matchmaking, they don't make it to where they should have."

Those are the words from Dmitriy Salita, the president and CEO of Salita Promotions, who believes that the art of matchmaking is one of the secret sauces that distinguishes great boxing companies from merely good ones. As a fighter under the Top Rank banner, Salita worked with respected matchmakers Bruce Trampler, Brad Goodman and Sean Gibbons, studying how fighters were moved and developed by some of the best talent evaluators in the business.

"I use this as an example," Salita said. "You take someone who was meant to be a great surgeon. And you take him from high school and put him right in the operating room. He's going to panic, close up or overreact. He might not do the right thing. He even risks killing someone. Now he is gone. He's going to leave medicine and do something else.

"However, if he finishes high school, goes to college, goes to medical school, goes to residency and then enters the operating room, now he's going to save a lot of lives and be as great as he could be."

Salita has been promoting since 2010. First, he promoted himself on

**Salita's "fighter first" approach helped multi-division champ Claressa Shields become a brand unto herself.**

his own cards, but by 2014, he realized that promoting was what he wanted to do for his post-fight career. As a novice promoter, he didn't have access to the best talent in the sport, but through scouting, an understanding of fighter development and shrewd matchmaking, he was able to get fighters such as Jermaine Franklin, Otto Wallin, Jarrell Miller, Vladimir Shishkin, Shohjahon Ergashev and others to the world stage. He believes that his focus on matchmaking gives his company a significant edge.

Salita was born in Ukraine, then a part of the U.S.S.R., and immigrated to Brooklyn as a kid. His home base is now Detroit, where he has promoted shows for several years. Despite Michigan's gloried history of boxing, with greats such as Joe Louis, Thomas Hearns, James Toney, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and countless others, when he arrived, he found the pro boxing scene to be lacking.

In an earlier interview, Salita described the Detroit boxing scene when he arrived: "There are a lot of very talented fighters in Detroit," he said, "and there have always been. But the fighters weren't being developed. And the streets, the pressure of life, withered many of them away. The problem was that people in Detroit would fight in a local high school. Someone who was 7-0 would fight someone who was 0-3. They were never tested. They were never developed. And then they would go to fight in Vegas against someone who was tested. But the Detroit guys didn't have the support to be able to progress. And that was that. No one was looking out for them.

"If you develop talented fighters wisely and properly, they can become contenders or world champions. If you have an infrastructure and a real system for developing fighters, from matchmaking to media to marketing to training, then the guys that have the talent can develop into something special. So I feel that there is a lot of potential here."

Salita's biggest success story in Michigan has been Claressa Shields, who is already on the historical short list for the best in women's boxing. Shields, from Flint, was a two-time Olympic gold medalist. Salita and his team have helped her become a massive ticket-seller. They've sold out Little Caesars Arena, home of the Detroit Pistons and Red Wings. Salita also recently re-signed Shields to a multimillion-dollar extension that includes a partnership with Wynn Records, an R&B music label. Even though Shields met with other notable parties in the sport prior to her renewal, including Matchroom Boxing and MVP Promotions, Shields decided to resume her working relationship with Salita.

"When I sign a fighter," Salita said, "I say, 'First I pay you, and then you pay me.' And what I mean by that is that when a fighter gets to a certain point, where he or she is the boss, then my job is to service them and make sure that they reach the upper echelon of their potential. Eventually the fighter becomes the brand, not me. You see other promoters where they themselves are the brand. And that's fine. They can be very successful that way. But with Salita Promotions, it's not about me. It's about the fighters and taking them as far as they can possibly go. With Claressa, we are now promoting her brand."

As a fighter, Salita challenged for a world title against Amir Khan and appeared on cards with some of the biggest fighters of the era, including Roy Jones, Floyd Mayweather, Wladimir Klitschko, Erik Morales and others. He was always taking notes about the boxing industry. He learned how fighters were successfully moved from level to level and the elements that led to big events for the sport.

His vision for success combines the old and the new, the big and the small. He espouses the tried-and-true methods of fighter development while also incorporating new elements, such as exploring novel partnerships, like those he has with Detroit-based 313 Presents and Wynn Records. He understands the importance of social media as a vital storytelling platform, yet he also embraces the power of "traditional media." He courts writers and television networks. Tony Harrison was recently on the local Fox Detroit affiliate promoting his upcoming fight on a Salita Promotions card. Harrison was also featured at a Red Wings and a Pistons game in the lead-up to the bout.

**Salita battles Derrick Campos at Madison Square Garden in 2008.**

**Rangy super middleweight Da'Velle Smith is among Salita's prospects.**

Salita believes that grassroots promoting is crucial for creating pathways for local fighters. He promotes both arena-sized events and shows at the Fox Theater. These events have helped grow the local boxing scene and foster aspirational dreams for up-and-coming fighters. His success with Shields and his visibility in the region have helped him recruit Michigan-based talent such as lightweight Joshua Pagan (14-0) and super middleweight Da'Velle Smith (14-0).

He believes that the perfect boxing company is the combination of a mom-and-pop shop blended with corporate vision. The mom-and-pop comes into play with specialized individual attention. Salita understands that each fighter is unique, with specific gifts, family and life situations, and challenges. Each fighter requires his or her own personal development plan.

But there also needs to be a corporate understanding of how to create big events and successful promotions. And with that aim, Salita has put together what he considers to be a dream team to execute his vision. His team includes David Berlin, the former executive director of the New York State Athletic Commission; Mark Taffet, the former head of HBO PPV; Chris DeBlasio, a former director for Showtime Boxing and communications ace; Crystal Frost, the former director of brand communications for Mayweather Promotions; and John Wirt, the former CEO of Roy Jones Jr.'s Square Ring Promotions. Salita also utilizes two matchmakers: Kings Promotions head Marshall Kauffman and Steve Clemente.

In addition, Salita believes that the quality of the television broadcast is essential in creating successful events. Even though his cards stream on DAZN, he controls the production of his events. He regards his broadcast team of Corey Erdman, Al Bernstein and Raul Marquez as the best in the business.

He is confident that his company will become a major player in the sport. In addition to promoting in Michigan, he's also focusing on Puerto Rico, another area that he thinks is ripe for a boxing renaissance. Similar to when he arrived in Detroit, he believes that the current boxing talent in Puerto Rico is impressive, but the infrastructure is not what it once was; he has already started to sign fighters and forge partnerships there.

Salita plans for a busy 2026 with shows in Michigan and Puerto Rico. He is also looking at other potential underserved boxing markets. He believes that his company has built a solid foundation and is well-positioned to become one of the leading promoters in boxing.

**SNAPSHOT FOR SALITA PROMOTIONS**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Company:** | **Salita Promotions** |
| **Established:** | **2014** |
| **Principals:** | **Dmitriy Salita, President and CFO**<br>**David Berlin, Chief Legal Counsel/Adviser**<br>**Marshall Kauffman, Matchmaker**<br>**Steve Clemente, Matchmaker** |
| **Broadcaster:** | **DAZN** |

# TO A STANDSTILL

**FORTY YEARS AGO, MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER BATTLED JOHN "THE BEAST" MUGABI IN WHAT WOULD BE THE FINAL SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE OF HIS CHERISHED MIDDLEWEIGHT CROWN. THIS ONE WAS ALL-OUT WAR.** BY RON BORGES

On the evening of March 10, 1986, an aptly named John "The Beast" Mugabi was about to learn two difficult lessons. The first was that Las Vegas is almost exclusively a place of broken dreams. The second was that the equally aptly named Marvelous Marvin Hagler was painfully good at delivering the first lesson.

Hagler had not lost a fight in 10 years and had successfully defended the middleweight championship

11 consecutive times. That meant nothing to Mugabi, however, because he had come to Vegas as most young men do, with a head filled with the kind of confidence that comes with being undefeated in life. Before midnight on that chilly evening, he would have a new perspective on life and a swollen face.

Mugabi had been born in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. It is a city of mostly hard parts, but Mugabi was spawned from the hardest, dropping out of school at the age of 7 after his father died in an auto accident. Nobody came looking for him.

By the age of 9, he was a gang member, a thief and a street fighter. He wasn't called "The Beast" for nothing.

"When I was a baby, I had to steal my dinners," Mugabi recalled. "Now I walk in through the front door. Anybody who tried to abuse me, I kicked his ass.

"I was good, but I fought [on the street] so people would say, 'This kid can beat even five people.' It is why I can fight anybody. I have fought since I was 9. Nobody do nothing for John Mugabi. It is God who taught me to fight."

Now 26 years old, Mugabi was the owner of an unblemished record of 25-0. Every opponent he'd faced had failed to go the distance with him.

Unfortunately for Mugabi, he was not the only man God had taught to fight. Hagler had come up from similarly hard circumstances in Newark, New Jersey. He had become a

relentless warrior too, a fighter who understood challenges and young men like Mugabi, men filled with hope and belief and bad intentions. He understood who "The Beast" was, but he also understood himself. It's why he had gone to court to make "Marvelous" his legal name.

The 31-year-old Hagler was 61-2-2 with 51 knockouts by this stage of his career and was coming off a brutal third-round knockout of one of boxing's true superstars, Thomas Hearns, 11 months earlier. It was not only the Fight of the Year. For many, it was, and remains, the greatest middleweight fight in boxing history. It was certainly the most spectacular, a three-round dogfight in which Hagler survived murderous blows without taking a backward step from one of boxing's hardest punchers before ending Hearns' Las Vegas dream with a barrage of punches that left his legs rubbery and his mind blinking like a tilted pinball machine. Hearns had lasted less than nine minutes in the presence of Marvelous Marvin Hagler before it was game over.

Hearns was in Las Vegas as well to fight a man named James Shuler. If he and Hagler both won, they were set to face each other again later in the year. But such had become the celebrity and mystique of Marvin Hagler that the size of Hearns' purse for a rematch was to be based on what he did with Shuler. Hearns had a unique series of clauses in his contract with Hagler's promoter, Top Rank's Bob Arum. If he knocked Shuler out within six rounds, he would be guaranteed $3.5 million for the rematch. If he knocked him out within 12 rounds, he would be guaranteed $3.25 million. If he won by decision, his purse for facing Hagler would shrink to only $3 million.

"Hagler's the only man I really still want to fight," Hearns insisted that week. "It's a fact that we don't communicate. He hates my guts and I hate his. It's not like it was with Ray Leonard. Leonard and I went out a few times. We had some good times. The only place I would take Hagler is to a mud-wrestling match so I could throw some mud on him.

"I respect him as a fighter, but as a person, I don't think much of him. I hate the ground he walks on."

What Hearns actually hated was the ground Hagler sat him on with a barrage of punches that left him semiconscious. Neither Hagler nor Mugabi were concerned with Hearns, however. Hagler figured he'd blow up that bridge when he came to it, while Mugabi believed after he was done with Hagler, he would be the one who decides which opponent he would face next.

"I realize Mugabi has the same dream I had," Hagler said before the fight. "He wants to be the champion. But it took me a long time to put food on the table and to wear nice clothes. Nobody is taking that away from me.

**Hagler's powerful and accurate southpaw jab was an awesome weapon against Mugabi, who got badly busted up.**

"I know my position. Guys like Mugabi keep coming up, keep coming after me, keep coming to take what I got. I help them gain financial security. This is what I do. I make 'em and then I break 'em."

The road to this match had long been a broken trail itself, as long and arduous a trek as the fight would become that night. It was originally scheduled for November 14, 1985, but Hagler, who was suffering from a sore back at the time, had his nose broken in training when a young sparring partner named Zach Hewitt accidentally butted him. It was only the first in a string of difficulties.

Shuler and Mugabi at the time had been Hagler's and Hearns' respective mandatory challengers for the titles they held (Hearns was still junior middleweight champion despite his loss to Hagler), but Mugabi had moved to middleweight in hopes of facing Hagler while Shuler agreed to take $250,000 in step-aside money from Hagler and landed the fight against Hearns instead. The first snag developed when the WBA then promoted its No. 2 contender, James Kinchen, to No. 1 and threatened Hagler that it would strip him of its version of the title if he refused to face the new mandatory challenger.

Hagler was unwilling to give up the WBA title, as that would mean he was no longer undisputed champion, and such was his celebrity after the dramatic win over Hearns that he now had the power to influence the sanctioning body's thinking. Prior to stopping Hearns, Hagler was a well-respected boxer within his profession, but outside of it he was veritably unknown. After his brutal victory, Hagler had become so popular to the general public that he began doing nationally televised ads for men's deodorant, pizza and other items, only adding to his sudden star status. By the time the WBA threatened him, he had more sway in the marketplace of public opinion than it did, and both sides knew it.

Arum began negotiating a settlement with WBA president Gilberto Mendoza, ultimately convincing him to install Mugabi as its No. 1 middleweight contender. Kinchen quickly sued Hagler, Arum and the WBA, saying, "I'd rather fight Hagler in the ring than in court."

The WBA immediately reversed course. But in boxing, as in many ways of life, money talks and all else walks. In this case, Kinchen walked into a two-fight promotional deal with Arum to face top contenders Iran Barkley and Juan Roldan, which proved to be a good deal for Mugabi, who got his shot at Hagler. It was also good for Hagler, who got his shot at earning a guaranteed $2.5 million plus an upside from the closed-circuit and pay-per-view sales on Showtime. In the case of Kinchen, the deal did not work out so well. He lost both fights and never got a 160-pound title shot. Mugabi, meanwhile, entered the ring as the No. 1-ranked middleweight in the world, and Hagler remained the undisputed champion of the IBF, WBA and WBC as well as the Ring Magazine champion. That's boxing.

Hagler was a heavy 3-to-1 betting favorite when the two men walked into the chilly outdoor arena constructed behind

Caesars Palace, with few believing Mugabi was ready to meet this challenge. Mugabi was not one of them.

"He is old," he said with a look of utter disrespect several days before the fight. "Boxing is [about] exchanging hands. He got two hands. I got two hands. What is he going to do to me with his hands?

"I'll hit him in the belly because his kidneys are old. His brain is full of punches. When he feels my power, his brains will bust out! I don't run. I'm just there to fight.

"The rule is elimination. That is what the ring is all about. I want Marvin Hagler's championship belt. He doesn't want to give it to me. I am going to have to take it from him. We destroy each other, and then there is a winner."

To be fair, Mugabi's legendary manager, Mickey Duff, was not quite so fervent in believing his fighter would be that winner. Duff knew Hagler was in for a more difficult night than he might be expecting, but he remained a realist.

"[Mugabi is] the best pound-for-pound puncher I've been involved with," claimed Duff, who had by then been in boxing's dark trade for 36 years and counting. "He may be the best puncher I've ever seen.

"For John to be effective, he has to hit Hagler. Everyone has hit Hagler. John hasn't fought too many Marvin Haglers, but my guy knows he only has to hit Hagler with a combination of three or four punches. If he does, there's no way he ain't gonna rock Hagler.

"I would have to be naive to say John is a cinch Monday night, but I have no doubt he is the toughest opponent Marvin Hagler has fought to date. He's the first opponent who will not be one percent intimidated by Hagler."

Duff would prove to be prescient on all points. Mugabi was not the least bit intimidated by Hagler's presence across the ring. In fact, attacking with his characteristically wild hooks, Mugabi won the first round in part because Hagler unwisely chose to fight him from an orthodox stance rather than his usual southpaw style.

Hagler quickly switched back to a left-handed stance in Round 2 and began the process of breaking Mugabi down by slamming a hard right jab into his face like a jackhammer. By fight's end, he would do it 186 times, controlling the terms of engagement with it initially and gradually using it to get inside Mugabi's powerful hooks to deliver the kind of telling blows that eventually can convince you this is not your night.

Mugabi was a hard man to convince, however. He did his own damage, especially in the first half of the fight, although he was rocked and hurt in Round 6 in a preview of things to come. The only thing that appeared to save Mugabi was the odd intervention of referee Mills Lane. That round, Hagler launched 95 punches in Mugabi's direction and landed 59, a connect rate of 62%.

That would be a winning total against most men, but The Beast was not most men. Still, he was clearly hurt when Lane jumped in to warn Hagler about low blows in the middle of a four-punch combination that had Mugabi reeling. The worst consequence for Hagler was that Lane's intervention allowed the retreating Mugabi time to recover. The next round, he would deduct a point from Hagler for a similar infraction.

Mugabi won Round 9 on all three judges' cards and Round 10 on two of three. Far more significantly, by then he had all but closed Hagler's right eye and had blood flowing from Hagler's nose. The champion led on all three cards when the bell rang for the 11th round, but he had paid a high price, as promised by Mugabi and Duff, to get inside Mugabi's wildly unorthodox wide hooks and tear at him from close quarters.

Having never ventured into the places Hagler was now taking him, Mugabi had begun to tire. His will remained, but his skills had begun to diminish from the lashing Hagler was putting on him.

**Despite Hagler's dominance, the damage Mugabi inflicted on the champ was plain for all to see.**

Between rounds 10 and 11, Mugabi leaned back against the ring post in his corner like a tired factory worker after a double shift. His chest heaved and his lips hung open to allow in more oxygen, as Duff, Mugabi's trainer George Francis and the priest who had baptized him into the Catholic Church a few weeks earlier all exhorted him to fight on.

"Do it for the children, John!" Duff hollered at him. "Do it for the children!"

But the challenger was beginning to feel the collective weight of all the punches he'd endured to get to this point. As Mugabi slowed down, Hagler moved ever closer, like a rattlesnake ready to strike, though he was paying a high price for this, higher even than Hearns had extracted, and his swollen face showed the cost. Yet nothing could convince him to back up. Nothing could stop his relentless defense of a title he believed was his and his alone. Not even a Beast could do that, and so, after having lost the previous two rounds on the scorecards of two of the three judges, Hagler lashed out one final time.

He struck Mugabi with two powerful rights two minutes into Round 11 that seemed to daze him. Then landed two more, the first knocking Mugabi back, and the second sending him slumping to the floor. Mugabi had weathered 398 punches from Marvelous Marvin Hagler, according to CompuBox, as the cost of attempting to win a championship. Instead, he'd become Hagler's 12th consecutive victim since first winning the middleweight title six years earlier.

After those final two crushing rights, Mugabi, exhausted, struggled to prop himself up in a sitting position, one hand resting on the ropes as Lane counted him out at 1:29 of the round. Only Mugabi's body had risen that far. His mind was still down.

"I never saw either right," Mugabi admitted later. "He was swinging around [from right-handed to left-handed]. He came round a different way. I tried my best to take Marvin Hagler. He is a great champion."

Almost in disbelief, Mugabi's loyal trainer skittered along the ring apron with a wet sponge in his hand. What he really needed was a life preserver, but it was too late to employ either to any good end.

It had been an unexpectedly hellish night at work for Hagler, but when all was said and done, he had left another man beaten into submission. As Lane moved in to finish his count, Mugabi stared into space, simply too exhausted to do anything else. His title quest ended, John "The Beast" Mugabi would be leaving Las Vegas like most of its visitors: He'd lost his bet and had taken a beating.

Hagler, meanwhile, smiled through bloody lips with his right eye nearly shut as tightly as a venetian blind. He would talk of retirement, not of Thomas Hearns that night. And he would speak about Mugabi far differently than he had the day before.

"My whole body is swollen," Hagler joked. "I got caught with a lot of shots, but I had to take them to get to him. He had a great strategy. It's very tough to knock the guy out when he fights with the strategy this guy used.

"I went after him early, but I had to retreat a little bit and wear him down. He was counterpunching, so I had to change my style. I had to be patient."

Marvin Hagler had taken a beating like never before, but he had also proven something once again. He'd proven he was indeed still Marvelous … and still the undisputed middleweight champion of the world. RING

# IN MEMORIAM
## Those Who Passed in 2025

**The year of 2025 was one of triumph and loss.**

Less than a day after the most historic individual triumph of the year – Terence Crawford's decision victory over Canelo Alvarez – the boxing world was devastated by news of Ricky Hatton's passing.

That 24-hour period of witnessing a significant event and then learning of the death of a beloved figure defined much of the year. For every adrenaline high provided by Crawford, Naoya Inoue, Oleksandr Usyk, Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez, Fabio Wardley, Conor Benn, Chris Eubank Jr. and the other standouts of 2025, there was a heartbreaking low of losing another member of our close-knit community.

Some were legends, like Hatton and George Foreman. Some, like Nino Benvenuti, Dwight Muhammad Qawi and Mike McCallum, were bona fide Hall of Famers. Others, like Greg Haugen and Livingston Bramble, were mainly known by older fans. Some, like Colin Hart, Don Elbaum, Michael Katz and Kenny Adams, carved out iconic careers during the course of long, full lives.

The most tragic losses were the young ones like Georgia O'Connor, Shigetoshi Kotari and Hiromasa Urakawa, who had just begun their careers, and those who passed away unexpectedly, such as The Ring's own Thomas Gerbasi.

They will all be missed.

The Ring acknowledges the members of the global boxing community who passed in 2025 (listed here in alphabetical order):

**Kenny Adams**
Hall of Fame trainer who was head coach for the 1988 U.S. Olympic team and worked with more than 25 world titleholders

**Rahaman Ali**
Brother of Muhammad Ali and former professional boxer

**Joey Archer**
Former middleweight contender and title challenger

**Kevin Ayodele**
Strength and conditioning coach for Anthony Joshua

**Nino Benvenuti**
Former junior middleweight champ, two-time middleweight champ and Hall of Famer

**Livingstone Bramble**
Former lightweight titleholder

**Joe Bugner**
Former heavyweight contender and title challenger

**Paul Burke**
Former British and Commonwealth lightweight champ, former two-time Commonwealth junior welterweight champ

**James Cook**
Former British and European super middleweight champ and Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for his work with youth

**John Cooney**
Junior lightweight professional

**Victor Conte**
Founder of Scientific Nutrition for Advanced Training (SNAC) and drug-testing consultant

**Floyd "Jumbo" Cummings**
Former heavyweight gatekeeper

**Don Elbaum**
Hall of Fame promoter

**Ebo Elder**
Former junior welterweight contender

**Luis Estaba**
Former junior flyweight titleholder

**George Foreman**
Former two-time heavyweight champ, oldest heavyweight to win a world title, The Ring's 1973 and 1976 Fighter of the Year, Hall of Famer

**Arturo Gatti Jr.**
Amateur boxer and son of Hall of Famer Arturo Gatti

**Frank Gelb**
Former promoter who was prominent in the U.S. Northeast, especially Atlantic City, New Jersey

**Thomas Gerbasi**
Combat sports writer, author, editor and publicist; 2024 recipient of the Nat Fleischer Award for excellence in boxing journalism from the Boxing Writers Association of America (BWAA)

**Sina Ghami**
Exercise rehabilitation coach for Anthony Joshua

**Tony Graziano**
Former boxing trainer, manager and restaurant owner

**Colin Hart**
Hall of Fame journalist and commentator; 2011 recipient of the BWAA Nat Fleischer Award

**Ricky Hatton**
Former junior welterweight champ, former welterweight titleholder, The Ring's 2005 Fighter of the Year, Hall of Famer, recipient of the MBE for services to sport

**Greg Haugen**
Former junior welterweight titleholder and two-time lightweight titleholder

**Michael Katz**
Hall of Fame sports reporter and columnist, 1981 recipient of the BWAA Nat Fleischer Award

**Shigetoshi Kotari**
Junior lightweight professional

**Vanes Martirosyan**
2004 U.S. Olympian and former junior middleweight contender

**Mike McCallum**
Former junior middleweight, middleweight and light heavyweight titleholder, Hall of Famer

**Paul McCullagh Jr.**
Former amateur standout, light heavyweight professional.

**Georgia O'Connor**
Former international-level amateur and junior middleweight professional

**Alejandra Olivares**
Former four-division titleholder

**Dwight Muhammad Qawi**
Former light heavyweight champ and cruiserweight titleholder, Hall of Famer

**Jose Santa Cruz**
Father and trainer of Leo Santa Cruz

**Hiromasa Urakawa**
Lightweight professional

**Kenny Vice**
Former lightweight gatekeeper and junior welterweight title challenger

**Alex Wallau**
Boxing commentator and network executive, Hall of Famer

# FUNDAMENTALS

By Ruth Raper

## FORGOTTEN CLASSIC

### Micky Ward UD 10 Emanuel Augustus

**» July 13, 2001, Hampshire Beach Casino, New Hampshire**

Under the ESPN *Friday Night Fights* banner, two junior welterweights stepped into the ring and delivered what would become The Ring's Fight of the Year for 2001. This was boxing in its purest form – no frills, just two fighters leaving everything in the ring.

Ward came in having stopped five of his last six opponents. His corner man and brother, Dicky Eklund, had it right: "Micky deserves the biggest payday out of any fighter today. He doesn't quit; he gives everyone their money's worth." Across the ring stood Emanuel Augustus (Burton at the time), the slick defensive wizard who had given Floyd Mayweather his toughest professional test to date. Augustus took the fight on just two weeks' notice.

From the opening bell, Ward came forward throwing everything but jabs, pinning Augustus to the ropes with looping hooks and relentless pressure. But Augustus' cross-guard defense and slick counters told a different story – CompuBox showed he was actually outlanding Ward. Round after round, Augustus displayed masterful skill, rolling with shots, creating angles and firing back with precision. The performance was so brilliant that by Round 7, even commentator Joe Tessitore wondered aloud if Augustus' work was going unnoticed.

Then came the ninth. As the momentum seemed to shift in Augustus' direction and the crowd chanted "MICKY! MICKY!" Ward reached into the deepest part of himself. Running on fumes and instinct, he unleashed his signature combination: left hook to the head, left hook to the body. Augustus crumpled with a grimace. "What a battle!" exclaimed Teddy Atlas, who had Augustus up by a point before the knockdown tilted everything.

The final round was pure carnage. Both men touched gloves and emptied their tanks, throwing punches with the knowledge that every second mattered. When the bell rang, referee Steve Smoger embraced both warriors, having witnessed something special up close.

The final punch stats told the tale: 421 landed for Augustus, 320 for Ward. Yet the judges saw it differently: 96-94, 96-91 and an absurd 98-90, all for Ward. The scorecards didn't come close to reflecting what really happened in that ring, but both men raised each other's arms aloft as a sign of respect.

Ward would go on to wage an epic trilogy with Arturo Gatti. Augustus finished his career at 38-34-6, a record that is journeyman-like at first glance. But look deeper and you'll find that the "Drunken Master" was an extremely skilled fighter with a brilliant boxing brain, proof that records rarely tell the full story. One wonders what might have been with better luck or different management.

What made this fight truly special was its context. Before Ward and Augustus, Fight of the Year honors were typically reserved for the sport's elite clashing under the bright lights of Las Vegas mega-casinos. This was two blue-collar fighters in New Hampshire proving that greatness doesn't need a grand stage.



## LOST FIGHT

### Rocky Graziano TKO 6 Tony Zale

**» July 16, 1947, Chicago**

**Shaky, dark and sinister – these words** describe not just the ghostly fragments of film that survive from Tony Zale vs. Rocky Graziano II, but the fever dreams that haunted Graziano long after. The popular slugger confessed the trilogy would wake him deep in the night, soaked in sweat, reliving his wars with The Man of Steel.

Those degraded reels feel almost intentional, as if nothing about Zale vs. Graziano was ever meant to be sanitized or preserved in pristine condition. This was the quintessential blue-collar trilogy: the Brooklyn street kid against the Indiana steelworker turned war veteran turned champion, a collision of working-class fury that mirrored postwar America itself. No style over substance, no glamour, no pretense, just flesh-and-bone violence that makes today's carefully sculpted superfights feel almost quaint.

Their second meeting – 10 months after Zale retained the middleweight championship with a sixth-round KO at Yankee Stadium – remains the savage heart of the rivalry. Chicago Stadium overflowed with nearly 19,000 fans, many streaming in from nearby Gary, Indiana, to witness their hero defend his title. What they saw from the opening bell was controlled demolition. Zale's body attack was relentless. Graziano's left eye swelled into a grotesque bulge. By the third round, Rocky's face had become a crimson wreck, and the referee issued a grim warning: the end was coming.

Then came the moment that altered boxing history and later inspired an iconic scene from Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* movie. Between the fourth and fifth rounds, Graziano's cornermen pressed a coin against that monstrous swelling, draining enough fluid to restore The Rock's vision. That desperate medical trick brought Rocky something more valuable than sight; it gave him hope.

What followed was inspired desperation transformed into pure violence. Graziano exploded from his corner, throwing right hands with suicidal abandon.

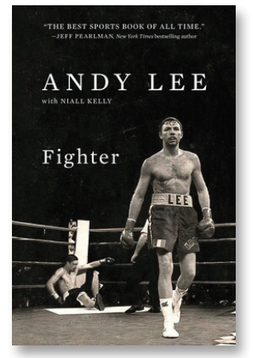
By the sixth, the shift was unmistakable. Zale, 34 years old and carrying the accumulated damage of a brutal 81-bout career, was fading. Graziano was not. Three vicious right hands found their home, and suddenly the indestructible champion was human, vulnerable, defenseless. At 2:10 of Round 6, the referee intervened, and Rocky Graziano, bloodied and exhausted, was middleweight champion of the world.

"Hey, Ma, your boy done good," he rasped into the microphone, his battered face already swelling into the iconic image newspapers would splash across the country. Then came the line that would become the title of his autobiography and Paul Newman's film: "Somebody up there likes me."

This wasn't boxing as sport. This was boxing as survival, as redemption, as working-class theater played out in blood and sweat under the Chicago lights. The film may be lost, but the fight remains eternal, not preserved in high definition, but in the darker corners of boxing's soul, where the realest battles are always fought.

## MUST READ

### *Fighter* » By Andy Lee and Niall Kelly (Publisher: Gill Books)




**Reading Andy Lee's *Fighter* is like sitting down with** one of boxing's finest minds for an intimate conversation. Lee's memoir weaves together some of the sport's most compelling characters while perfectly capturing boxing's dizzying highs and crushing lows.

Lee's journey reads like a boxing fairy tale, from a young Irish Traveller learning his trade at London's iconic Repton Boxing Club to his return home, through the heartbreak of Olympic disappointment, to being scouted by the legendary Emanuel Steward.

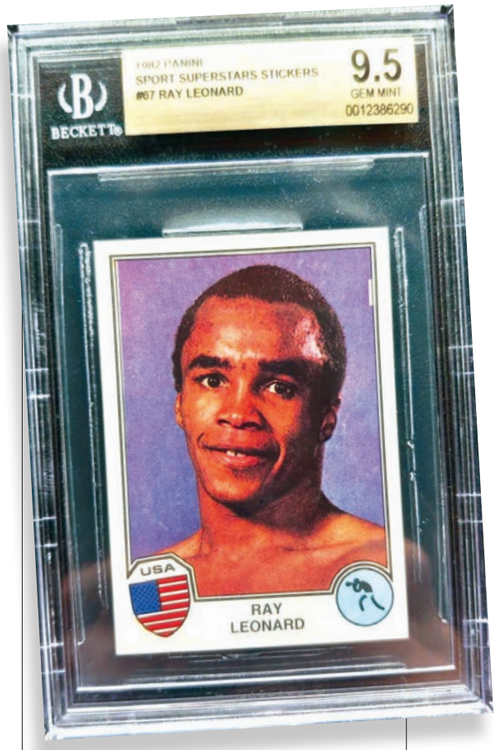
Lee's path to world title glory wasn't linear. Professional setbacks and a partnership with Adam Booth would ultimately reshape his career, each chapter revealing another layer of the fighter's evolution.

What sets this memoir apart is Lee's ability to illuminate the rich tapestry of Romani boxing culture, a world often misunderstood or overlooked. His time at Detroit's famous Kronk Gym with Steward provides readers an all-access pass to one of boxing's most storied institutions, capturing the wisdom and warrior spirit that defined that legendary stable.

Lee is a philosopher in boxing gloves, drifting seamlessly between the brutal realities of the ring and the introspective musings of a man navigating both sport and life. His words never flinch from boxing's harsh truths, yet they maintain a deeply human perspective that transcends the violence of Lee's profession. *Fighter* isn't just a boxing memoir – it's a textbook on ambition, identity and the price of greatness. RING

# INTERNATIONAL TREASURE

By Dan Rafael




Year in and year out, card collectors look forward to mainstream baseball, football, basketball and hockey sets being released along with a variety of secondary sets. Boxing fans have never had it that good or even close.

There have been some widely released boxing sets through the years, but they have been extremely sporadic. Industry leader Topps, for example, put out the iconic Ringside set in 1951 and did not release another all-boxing collection until 74 years later, when it issued the 2024-branded Chrome Boxing set in September 2025.

There were four fairly mainstream sets in the 1990s: Kayo, which was wildly overproduced, All World Boxing, Ringlords and Ringside (no relation to the Topps set). There were also several Brown's Boxing sets, sold in the 1980s until the early 2000s, which came only as complete sets – no packs – and had very low print runs.

If those did not satisfy the collector in you, there were sets produced outside of the U.S. to pursue, some containing great cards or stickers. Today, the stars from those sets do not come cheap.

There are three sets in particular I am a huge fan of that are filled with star power – the must-have 1981 Panini Sports Superstars sticker set from Italy, the 1996-1999 set from the Japanese magazine World Boxing, and the 2007 Rafo Fighters Borci sticker set from (seriously) the Southeast European country of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## 1981 Panini Sports Superstars

Panini produced multi-sport sticker sets from the 1960s through the 1980s, with the stickers meant to be pasted into an album bought separately.

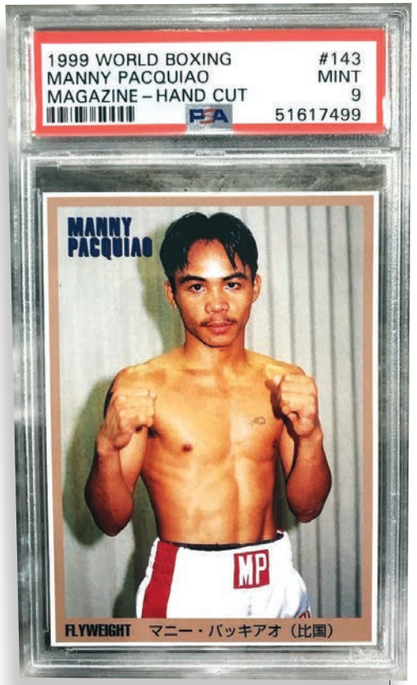
Those sets always contained a smattering of top boxing stars. Muhammad Ali (disrespectfully listed as Cassius Clay on all of his stickers), Joe Frazier, the George Foreman rookie, Mike Tyson rookie, Evander Holyfield and many other legends were featured.

The 1981 Sports Superstars complete set boasts 360 stickers of athletes from many sports, with 15 being boxers. Though not many boxers were included, it is absolutely loaded. The album has two facing pages dedicated to pasting the boxing stickers into their assigned rectangles. Whoever was in charge of fighter selection deserves a championship belt for the outstanding job they did.

For basketball collectors, the 1986 Fleer set is the one to own. It is jam-packed with big rookie cards featuring Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley, Patrick Ewing, Karl Malone and numerous other superstars. The 1981 Panini sticker set is like that for boxing. It contains rookies of some of the most legendary fighters of all time in Hall of Famers Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns, Larry Holmes, Salvador Sanchez, Wilfredo Gomez, Wilfred Benitez, Matthew Saad Muhammad and Hilario Zapata.

It also contains the second appearance of Roberto Duran, whose rookie is in the 1973 Panini set. The other fighters included were world champions of the day: Maurice Hope, Cornelius Boza-Edwards, Ayub Kalule, Jim Watt and Alan Minter.

The stickers are not particularly tough to find unless they are in high grade, and the big names in high grade also come with a big price. Panini stickers, regardless of the year, are extremely condition-sensitive because of the very thin paper they were printed on.




## 1996-1999 World Boxing

In the United States, we have Ring Magazine, but in Japan, the go-to pugilistic publication has been World Boxing, which is home to one of the greatest boxing card sets ever.

From 1996 to 1999, each monthly issue contained a panel of four cards that was printed on nice stock and meant to be cut apart. Overall, the set consists of 45 panels and 180 cards.

On the front, the name of the fighter and his division are printed in English along with Japanese, and the backs are entirely in Japanese. But even if you can't read Japanese, it is a star-studded set that includes many rookies and follows a theme – each panel typically featured two active Japanese boxers, a retired legend and one active non-Japanese boxer.

The most important card in the set, without question, is the rookie of legendary eight-division champion, Hall of Famer and former pound-for-pound king Manny Pacquiao. His card appeared in the February 1999 issue, which was published shortly after he won the lineal/WBC flyweight title by knocking out Chatchai Sasakul in December 1998.

The Pacquiao rookie card can be found regularly on eBay, but get ready to pay about $1,000 for an ungraded one and a lot more for one slabbed and in nice shape. Years ago, before they really shot up in price, I bought a complete issue of the magazine for about $200 with the mint panel intact inside. I cannot bring myself to remove it and cut the cards apart.

But the set is more than just about Pacquiao. It includes numerous legends, such as Ali, Frazier, Leonard, Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, Henry Armstrong, Jack Johnson, Archie Moore, Jose Napoles, Emile Griffith, Masahiko "Fighting" Harada, Bob Foster, Carlos Monzon, Jersey Joe Walcott, Carlos Zarate, Sanchez, Gomez, Benitez and many more.

Key rookies besides Pacquiao include Ricardo Lopez (who shares the first panel in the set with Ali), Bernard Hopkins, Felix Trinidad, Shane Mosley, Erik Morales and Kostya Tszyu (albeit with his first name misspelled as Costya).

There are also non-rookie cards of many top champions and stars of the time who went on to become legends and Hall of Famers, such as Lennox Lewis, Oscar De La Hoya, Johnny Tapia, Terry Norris, Prince Naseem Hamed, Mark "Too Sharp" Johnson and Azumah Nelson.

## 2007 Rafo Fighters Borci

Bosnia and Herzegovina isn't exactly a boxing hotbed, but it is home to a tremendously interesting set of 324 stickers that are somewhat obscure but can be found on eBay, with top stars often going for $100 or more. I am quite pleased I found the ones I wanted many years ago for pretty cheap! Borci, by the way, means "fighters" in Bosnian, at least according to Google Translate.

The first 162 stickers are MMA fighters; 163-243 are pro wrestlers (including the likes of Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair and The Rock); 244-279 are the boxers; 280-315 are bodybuilders; and the last nine stickers include Bruce Lee and fictional tough guys such as Rocky Balboa, Rambo, Batman, Superman and the Terminator.

As far as the boxers go, the set has many top stars of the 2000s, which is a meaningful era to me because those were my relative early days on the beat and I covered most of those fighters.

Over the years, I have bought the boxers I consider the biggest stars in the set: Tyson, Holyfield, Lewis, Roy Jones, Julio Cesar Chavez, Wladimir Klitschko, Vitali Klitschko, Hopkins, Joe Calzaghe, Hamed, De La Hoya and my all-time favorite fighter, Arturo Gatti, whose name was botched and spelled Gutti. The Ring copy editors are much better than the folks who handled this set in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

FIGHT OF FANTASY:

# LENNOX LEWIS

# TYSON FURY

By Anson Wainwright

Who would win a clash between two of Britain's finest heavyweight champions? Lennox Lewis, the Olympic gold medalist who, in the early 1990s, became the first England-born boxer to win a heavyweight title since Bob Fitzsimmons, then claimed undisputed champion status by the end of the decade? Or Tyson Fury, who made heavyweight history with his upset of Wladimir Klitschko and his unforgettable trilogy with Deontay Wilder?

A standout amateur in Canada, where Lennox's mother relocated the family when he was 12, Lewis defeated Riddick Bowe in the finals of the 1988 Summer Games in Seoul. He turned pro in his native England and collected British, Commonwealth and European titles as he climbed the world heavyweight rankings. In his coming-out party, Lewis stopped dangerous contender Razor Ruddock (TKO 2) in October 1992. He was awarded the WBC title when Bowe, then the undisputed champ, refused to face him. Lewis made three defenses before he suffered a shocking knockout loss to Oliver McCall in September 1994.

Lewis bounced back with a vengeance under Emanuel Steward's tutelage, defeating a string of top contenders – including Tommy Morrison, Ray Mercer, McCall (regaining the WBC belt), Henry Akinwande, Andrew Golota and Shannon Briggs (for lineal recognition) – until he was held to a controversial draw by IBF/WBA titleholder Evander Holyfield in March 1999. However, he outpointed the American legend in their rematch eight months later, unifying all of the major titles. A surprise loss to Hasim Rahman in 2001 lit a fire under him, and he exacted revenge in four brutal rounds. A megafight knockout triumph over Mike Tyson preceded a violent brawl with Vitali Klitschko in June 2003, which Lewis won on cuts. He announced his retirement in February 2004.

Meanwhile, Fury's quality was questionable at times, but, like Lewis, he claimed British, Commonwealth and European honors on his way up. That set the stage for a fight with Ring/IBF/WBA/WBO ruler Wladimir Klitschko, who lost a points decision upset in November 2015. Fury's life then went off the rails, and he didn't fight for over two and a half years. When "The Gypsy King" did return, he was unlucky to receive a draw against Deontay Wilder but later scored two knockout wins over the American, claiming Ring and WBC titles in the first.

Fury also enjoyed blockbuster nights against Dillian Whyte (TKO 6) and Derek Chisora (TKO 10) but lost a pair of decisions to the outstanding Oleksandr Usyk (SD 12, UD 12).

Both men are very smart and excellent technicians. Could one of them find an edge? How would Lewis, who was usually the larger man, deal with someone even bigger than himself? Or would Fury be found wanting against someone just as strong, skilled and powerful as himself?

### Lawrence Okolie

***Heavyweight contender, former WBO cruiserweight titleholder***

"It's hard for me, because I've watched Lennox Lewis and I believe he's a legend. A great, great fighter, done amazing things in the sport, legendary stuff. But then so has Fury.

"They would each have to do the same thing, but it's about who could do it better, consistently. They both come from the same Kronk school, working well behind a solid jab, trying to land right hands over the top and mixing up the rhythm, head to body. I think that Lennox Lewis would need to land more hard, devastating shots to try to put a halt to the fight, whereas I think Tyson Fury would have to rely on will to win and stamina to box his way to a points victory.

"I think it would be a 50/50 fight where Tyson Fury would have the range, the grits. However, Lennox Lewis would have the pugilist specialty and might want it more. Ultimately, I think it would go down to Tyson on points."

**Prediction: Fury PTS**

### Tony Sims

***World-class trainer***

"I think it would be more of a mentally draining fight for both of them. They're both very smart, intelligent boxers, and I think it would be a fight of the jab and movement. It would be a very difficult fight for both of them. At their peaks, they were very hard people to beat.

"I think [Lennox] would probably try to stay [in the] center of the ring and obviously pressurize Tyson. I think he would try to hit him to the body a lot with jabs and bring the right hand over the top. He had a great right hand. I think Lennox would try to outbox him first and maybe go for the knockout later on by putting combinations together.

"Tyson would try to do what he always does, and that's outbox people and outthink people. He's obviously a very intelligent fighter. His feints – he's great at feinting. I call him the king of the feints. He makes people do things they don't want to do. He forces fighters into punching when they don't want to. He's a great counterpuncher. His size and how long his arms are, it's very difficult when he's in unbelievable shape to get near to him. He'd feint, work his jab, straight right hand, put the uppercuts in underneath when you least expect them.

"I think it's a difficult fight for both fighters to fight and a difficult one to score as well. Either one could win the fight. I think Fury would win a very close points decision."

**Prediction: Fury PTS**

### Gareth A Davies

***Journalist and broadcaster***

"A prime Lennox Lewis, which was late '90s to early 2000s, against the very best Tyson Fury is an intriguing fantasy fight. Lewis: first of the super heavyweight era, undeniable skills, fine jab and finisher's right hand, allied with a deep composure. Disciplined fighter, astute ring generalship.

"The best Fury opposing him would have to be a combination of the clever defensive fighter who dismantled Wladimir Klitschko in 2015 and the Gypsy King who beat up Deontay Wilder in their second encounter. But Fury would need to make it a boxing match, which would have been his best chance. So, defensive awkwardness and heavy hands when needed.

"The battle of the jab would have been key in the early rounds. Fury would need to tie up on the inside and get ahead in the fight. Lewis always seemed to warm to the task. Manny Steward and Ben Davison would be in the corners. Both would weigh in around 250 pounds. As they dance, Fury ahead by 5-3 after eight close rounds, Lewis, in my view, then comes into his own.

"I spoke to Lewis about the fight with Fury in Miami in December 2025. 'It would have been a great challenge,' he concurred, 'but I would have won by stoppage.' I believe Lewis would have done so, probably late in the fight. I would also rank Lewis as arguably the heavyweight who could have beaten any heavyweight in any era. But as Lewis also showed twice in his career, even the greats are vulnerable to the KO."

**Prediction: Lewis KO**

*Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk, and you can follow him on X @AnsonWainwr1ght.*

# WHO'S THAT IN THE CORNER?

By Thomas Hauser

**Joe Bugner and Marvis Frazier following their 1983 bout.**

What was Hall of Fame promoter Frank Warren doing in Joe Bugner's corner when Bugner fought Marvis Frazier in Atlantic City more than 40 years ago?

Working.

"I worked the corner for many of my early fighters," Warren recalls. "The first time I did it was around 1977 and I did it dozens of times after that. Ernie Fossey, who was also my matchmaker, trained fighters and was probably the best cutman in the U.K. back then. Ernie was very blunt. He had no diplomacy. He would tell a fighter how it was before, during and after a fight. My job was to wipe the fighter down, put some Vaseline on his face and pass the water bottle to Ernie when he wanted it. There should be one voice – and only one voice – in the corner, and that was Ernie's."

Bugner fought Frazier at The Sands Casino Hotel on June 4, 1983. "It wasn't very exciting," Warren remembers. "Joe was well past his prime by then. He just couldn't do it anymore. And Marvis wasn't very good."

Frazier won a 100-90, 98-92, 96-94 decision. The 98-92 scorecard, which Warren remembers as being "probably the most accurate of the three," was turned in by Harold Lederman.

"Then I stopped working corners," Warren says. "I just didn't have the time."

What stands out in Warren's mind about his experiences as a cornerman?

"Being up close; living in the moment with the fighter. You're right there, watching his trials and tribulations. To this day, there are times when I'll go to the corner during a fight and offer advice to the trainer. I know what's going on. I've been there."

Almost always, a fighter's trainer is the lead cornerman (chief second) during a fight. He's the one who gets in the ring between rounds and gives instructions to the fighter. Other responsibilities are shared and include duties like closing cuts, applying an enswell to reduce swelling, wiping the fighter down, handling the water bottle and being the bucket carrier.

Being a bucket carrier can be an interesting proposition.

"Remember," one well-respected trainer (who shall remain anonymous) told the bucket carrier just before leaving the dressing room for a championship fight. "If I tell you, 'Bucket,' you know what to do."

"Bucket" was code for "Knock the bucket over and spill water and ice into the ring to get us another 20 seconds while the referee or inspector cleans up the mess."

But there are limits to what a cornerman can do.

Prior to fighting Max Baer in 1935, Joe Louis was asked if he was worried by the fact that Jack Dempsey would be in Baer's corner during the fight.

"The rules say Dempsey can't hit me, don't they?" Louis replied.

Elite fighters tend to work with the same cornermen fight after fight. At the other end of the spectrum, B-side fighters, particularly if they're from out of town, often pick up one or more cornermen on the night of a fight.

Ferdie Pacheco, who was in Muhammad Ali's corner for most of Ali's ring career, observed, "It's a huge rush to go up in the corner with a great fighter. There's only three of you there with him and the entire world sees it. It's unvarnished ego."

The problem is that sometimes ego leads a manager or someone else who craves the limelight to insert himself in a fighter's corner against good practice.

Sometimes the fighter wants them there. Johnny Tapia's cornermen over the years included superb trainers like Eddie Futch, Freddie Roach, Teddy Atlas and Jesse Reid. But his cornermen also included Mickey Rooney (whose boxing experience was limited to a role in the film version of Requiem for a Heavyweight), Mr. T (Clubber Lang in Rocky III), and Rock & Roll Hall of Famer Sammy Hagar (a member of Van Halen).

Vanity cornermen, celebrity cornermen, dilettantes – call them what you will – are generally deadweight. And their presence in a fighter's corner on fight night can be counterproductive.

"Putting a manager, a celebrity or a friend in the corner is dangerous, egomaniacal idiocy," says the always opinionated Lou DiBella. "It ain't your lane, bro. I'd make an exception for Frank Warren. Frank knew what he was doing. He was a street guy. He grew up around fighting and knows boxing better than most trainers. But I know more about boxing than 99% of the people in the sport and I'd never do it."

"These people don't understand how important a cornerman can be," adds Hall of Fame trainer Russ Anber. "I want to tell them, 'Hey, guy, this isn't about being a fan and having a great seat for the fight.' There's no downside if everything goes according to plan. The fighter looks great. Knockout. They give him his belts. Everybody's happy. Things never get to a point where you see what the corner might have been most needed for. But if things start to break down, every person in the corner has a role to play. And that's when having an amateur in the corner can be a problem."

Don Turner, who trained Evander Holyfield and Larry Holmes, is in accord. "It's all about ego," Turner says. "These guys want to be part of the show so their friends can see them on television. So they push a guy who should be in the corner out of the corner. And if something goes wrong, they say it was somebody else's fault. You want boxing guys who know what's going on in the corner."

"There are people who belong in the corner and people who don't," Craig Hamilton explains. "I managed Michael Grant and I never worked his corner. It wasn't my place. Jerry Jones thinks he can make football decisions for the Dallas Cowboys. And we've seen how that works out. Dallas hasn't reached the NFL championship game in 30 years. These people don't belong in a fighter's corner. It's not a problem until it is. The fighter gets in trouble. He goes back to his corner, looks around, and sees a knucklehead. What do you think that does to his confidence?"

"This isn't fantasy baseball camp," Hall of Fame promoter Russell Peltz notes. "You don't see a player's agent or a club owner coaching third base in a Major League Baseball game. But there are almost no barriers to doing whatever you want to do in boxing. Nonsense like this doesn't make things better, and it might hurt. Either you're doing things professionally or you aren't."

"I worked a corner once," Peltz continues. "Rogers Mtagwa fought in Evansville, Indiana, against Orlando Salido [in 2006]. Joe Parella, who was Mtagwa's manager, asked me to carry the bucket because they were short a man. But the truth is, I had no more business being in the corner that night than a cutman would have promoting a fight."

Mtagwa was knocked out in the fifth round. More troubling, a fighter named Kevin Payne won a split decision over Ryan Maraldo on the same card. One day later, Payne died from injuries that he'd suffered during the fight.

"I have no idea what went on in Payne's corner that night," Peltz says. "I'm not saying they did anything wrong. But it tells you that boxing isn't a game, doesn't it." RING

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*Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – The Universal Sport – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, Hauser was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*

**Hearns and Shuler square off for a pre-fight publicity photo.**

# THE LONG MARCH

By Randy Gordon

Recently, my longtime SiriusXM Radio partner Gerry Cooney, along with Senior Producer Andre Viola and our producer, "Bulldozer" Ben Queen, were sitting in a boardroom going over our planned guest schedule for the next four weeks. The topic of anniversaries of top fights in the month of March came up. March is easy. My birthday is in March. It's on the 11th. I easily remember boxing dates in proximity to my birthday – especially important fights, big fights and megafights.

As my SiriusXM team prepared to explore the internet, I held up my hand.

"March is my month," I said.

"Watch this." I started scribbling on the pad in front of me. In order, here are the dates I listed:

- **March 8 (1971) – Joe Frazier UD 15 Muhammad Ali in the "Fight of the Century."**
- **March 22 (1967) – Muhammad Ali stops Zora Folley. It was Ali's final fight before he was stripped of his boxing license for three and a half years.**
- **March 10 (1986) – Marvin Hagler KO 11 John Mugabi; Thomas Hearns KO 1 James Shuler; and Mike Tyson KO 3 Steve Zouski.****
- **March 4 (1968) – Joe Frazier opens the new Madison Square Garden by beating Buster Mathis.**

- **March 24 (1975) – Muhammad Ali TKO 15 Chuck Wepner. Struggling actor/writer Sylvester Stallone was watching and got the idea for a screenplay, which turned into Rocky.**
- **March 31 (1976) – My professional debut and retirement, both on the same night!**
- **March 31 (1973) – Ken Norton broke Muhammad Ali's jaw and beat him on a 12-round split decision.**
- **March 9 (1987) – The start of George Foreman's amazing comeback, which I talked him into.**

My original plans were for me to be in Las Vegas for Marvin Hagler's defense of his middleweight title against unbeaten slugger John "The Beast" Mugabi. The night's co-feature was a 12-round bout for the NABF middleweight title between Thomas Hearns and unbeaten contender James "Black Gold" Shuler.

I had met Shuler the night of his debut in New York in September 1980 and we became immediate friends. I was ringside for each of Shuler's 22 victories. I announced one of them on ESPN.

During our five and a half years of friendship, I had visited him several times in Philadelphia to watch him train. Quite often, he'd show up at the gym on his motorcycle. I owned one in college. After seeing a few friends who also rode motorcycles severely injured after being struck by automobiles driven by intoxicated drivers, I gave up my "bike." I cringed whenever Shuler would pull up to the gym on his, which was admired by another Philadelphia motorcycle rider – Smokin' Joe Frazier.

"If I was your manager," I'd say to Shuler, "I'd tell you to sell the bike!"

He'd put an arm around my shoulders and playfully say with a laugh, "I'm glad you ain't my manager!"

Omar Vega

The years went by, and our friendship remained. So did his bike. I don't think there was ever a time we spoke where I didn't say, "Get rid of that bike!" One day he surprised me after I said that.

"I've got good news and bad news," he said.

"Give me both," I sighed.

"Well, you'll love to hear that I sold my bike," Shuler told me. "That's my good news."

"Great!" I exclaimed. But I didn't get too excited. I knew bad news was on the way. I expected to hear exactly what I did.

"I bought a new one," he then said. "It's a lot bigger. And faster!"

"Wonderful!" I said facetiously.

"Don't worry," Shuler told me. "I'm a very safe driver."

"It's not you I worry about," I replied. "It's all the unsafe drivers."

★★★★

**Shortly after that conversation,** Shuler called to tell me he was close to signing a contract for his next fight. His opponent would be Hearns. It would be the co-feature to Hagler-Mugabi. As much as I wanted to see that middleweight title bout, I wanted to see Hearns-Shuler more. Shuler had talked to me constantly about his desire to face Hearns, especially after Hearns dispatched Roberto Duran in June 1984 and Fred Hutchings three months later.

"I know I can beat him," Shuler told me. "I know I can."

When it was announced that Hearns would be challenging Hagler in April 1985, Shuler was hoping to gain a spot on the undercard. It was not to be, as Shuler had recently beaten previously unbeaten James "The Heat" Kinchen by a split decision in a bruising, action-packed fight and needed time to recover.

Instead of fighting on the undercard of Hagler-Hearns, he watched from ringside.

"I want the winner," he told me. "I don't care who it is, but I'm pulling for Hearns."

While Shuler didn't get the winner from that April 1985 classic, he did get his wish for having Thomas Hearns as an opponent.

Hagler went from his victory in the Hearns slugfest to another slugfest – this time against Mugabi. Shuler was given his dream opponent. The winner was all but promised the next shot at Hagler. Would it be Hearns in a mouthwatering rematch, or Shuler?

When it was announced that Shuler would be facing Hearns, I knew I had to be there. I promised him I would. I made arrangements to go.

Around two weeks before the fight, I received a call from Jim Jacobs, the co-manager of Mike Tyson. At the time, Tyson was 19 years old and unbeaten in 18 fights. He had stopped every opponent. None had lasted past the sixth round.

At the time, I was referring sparring partners and even a few opponents for Tyson. Jacobs knew my birthday was March 11, and he and Team Tyson had a surprise for me.

"How would you like to announce Mike Tyson's next fight?" asked Jacobs.

"Sure!!" I exclaimed. Almost immediately, I realized it was on March 10, at the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island. I would be in Las Vegas with James Shuler. I told Jacobs I wouldn't be able to do it because of my commitment to Shuler. Jacobs asked if I could call Shuler and explain this situation.

"We know that Mike is going to be heavyweight champion of the world," said Jacobs. "There will be no TV for Mike's fight. We'd like you to call the fight for historical purposes.

"Look," said Jacobs. "Shuler will be earning his living that night in Las Vegas. You earn your living as an announcer. We'll pay you very well for the fight. Afterwards, the crowd at the Coliseum will be able to watch both the Hagler-Mugabi and Hearns-Shuler fight on a big screen. Call Shuler. I am sure he will understand."

When I called Shuler and told him of my dilemma, he was excited for me.

"By all means, take the gig!" he said. "Then sit back and watch me beat Hearns."

It was a great night for me. The Tyson-Zouski fight, which was over in the third round, is shown with regularity on ESPN. Things didn't go as well for Shuler. He was knocked out in the first round.

I tried to call him in his room that night at Caesars Palace, but he wasn't taking calls. I reached him two days later at home.

"Hey, I got caught. It happens. I'd love to have another crack at him."

He changed the subject and asked. "How'd it go announcing Tyson's fight?" I told him it went very well but ended any further discussion about my fun announcing gig. It was nice of him to ask, but I'm sure his mind was elsewhere.

He told me he planned on taking a few days off, then getting back into the gym.

"I will work harder than ever to come back. I know I can beat Hearns … and Hagler, too." He really believed that.

He left this world believing that.

When the word came that he was killed when his motorcycle was hit by a tractor-trailer on a lonely road in Philadelphia one week after his loss to Hearns, I wasn't shocked. I wasn't stunned. I was saddened. I feared that would happen. Perhaps he did, too.

Many think he drove too fast that day, depressed over the loss and not wanting to go on. I don't believe that. On the phone days earlier, he sounded fine. He sounded like a fighter with a plan and a mission, not like a man in a dark place with no hope.

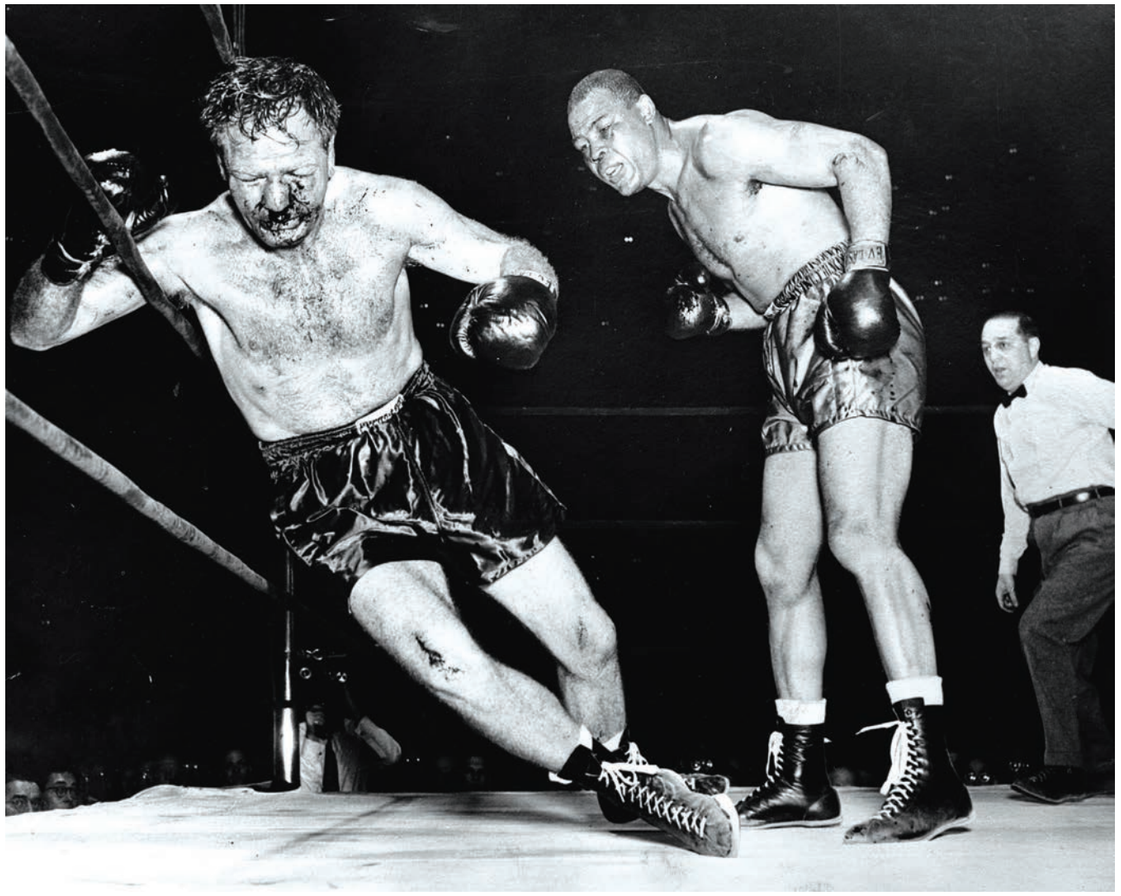
At the Baker Funeral Home in Philadelphia, an overflow crowd paid their respects.

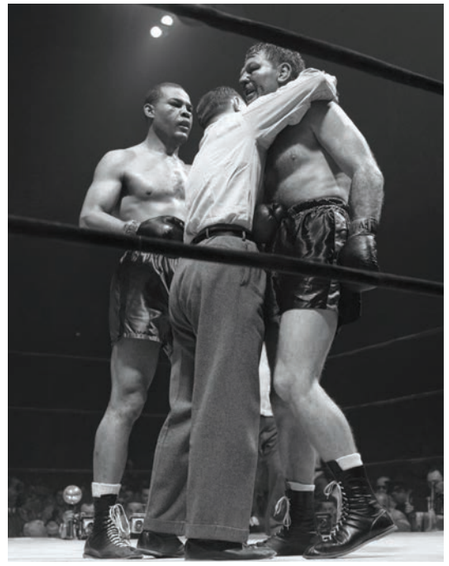
At his service, I stood at his casket with tears streaming down my face. I thanked him for coming into my life six years earlier.

I took a deep breath, then whispered to the spirit of James Shuler, which I felt all around me: "I told you to get rid of that damn bike a long time ago!" RING

## FINISHING SHOTS By Tom Gray

**THE FINAL BOMB:** On June 15, 1951, the great former heavyweight champion Joe Louis continued his comeback when he faced Minnesota-based veteran and Ring-rated contender Lee Savold at Madison Square Garden. While now in obvious decline, Louis still had too much of everything for his opponent, who was badly cut up by The Brown Bomber's signature jab and rapier combinations. The end came in Round 6 when Louis followed up on a brutal right hand with a fight-ending left hook to the jaw. This was the 52nd and final knockout of Louis' legendary career.





# FIGHTLINE

BY DOUG FISCHER

**Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.**

This month we're linking two stouthearted and marvelously talented switch-hitters who dominated their weight classes but knew when to walk away from the sport – former undisputed middleweight champ **Marvelous Marvin Hagler** and former pound-for-pound king **Terence Crawford**.

A native of Newark, New Jersey, Hagler found boxing after his family moved to Brockton, Massachusetts. Under the tutelage and guidance of Pat and Goody Petronelli, Hagler had a successful amateur career culminating with the 1973 national AAU 165-pound title. He turned pro the same year and had climbed to the No. 1 spot in The Ring's middleweight rankings by 1977.

However, Hagler was denied a world title shot until his 50th pro bout in November 1979, when the punishing technician faced Vito Antuofermo. Unfortunately, Hagler was denied by two of the judges, resulting in a controversial 15-round split draw. Four bouts and 10 months later, Hagler traveled to London to face Antuofermo's conqueror, Alan Minter, and bludgeoned his fellow southpaw to a third-round stoppage that sparked a disgraceful riot inside Wembley Arena.

Hagler was a dominant champion, making 12 title defenses over the next seven years – including a bloody rematch stoppage of Antuofermo, a 15-round decision over a resurgent Roberto Duran, a legendary shoot-out with Thomas Hearns, and a brutal battle of attrition against John "The Beast" Mugabi – until dropping a 12-round split decision to Sugar Ray Leonard that is disputed to this day.

Although Hagler, who passed away in 2021, had lucrative rematches with Leonard and Hearns on tap, he hung up his gloves and never gave in to the temptation of returning. He retired with a 62-3-2 (52 KOs) record and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1993.

Like Hagler, Crawford is a skilled southpaw who can fight effectively as a right-hander. The Omaha, Nebraska, native also shares the fierce tenacity that defined the middleweight king of the 1980s.

However, paralleling Hagler's early career struggles, Crawford turned pro to little fanfare in 2008 and boxed under the radar until he was able to sign with Top Rank a few years later. His opportunity to impress the venerable promotional company and an HBO audience came unexpectedly in March 2013 when, on three days' notice, he served as a late sub against veteran puncher Breidis Prescott in the co-feature to the Brandon Rios-Mike Alvarado rematch. In his first 10-round bout, Crawford outclassed the experienced Colombian.

One year and three bouts later, Crawford clearly outpointed Ricky Burns for the WBO lightweight belt in the titleholder's native Scotland, and he was off to the races. Victories over then-undefeated Yuriorkis Gamboa (TKO 9) and Raymundo Beltran (UD 12) – for the vacant Ring championship – followed in 2014, earning "Bud" the Boxing Writers Association of America's Fighter of the Year award.

From 2015 to 2017, Crawford collected the four major 140-pound titles, plus the Ring belt, to become the first undisputed junior welterweight champion of the four-belt era. In June 2018, Crawford halted Jeff Horn (TKO 9) for the WBO welterweight belt, but promotional/network politics prevented him from unifying 147-pound titles for five years. Fortunately, in July 2023, unified titleholder Errol Spence Jr. granted Crawford, then a free agent, an opportunity to earn undisputed champ status at 147 pounds. Bud brutally dominated Spence (TKO 9), instantly ascending to the top of the sport.

A WBA junior middleweight title win over Israil Madrimov in 2024 preceded the biggest event of 2025, a showdown with undisputed super middleweight champ Canelo Alvarez, which Crawford commanded from start to finish. The unanimous decision victory stamped the veteran, who turned 38 two weeks later, as one of the best of his generation. With nothing left to prove and no more hills to climb, Crawford (42-0, 31 KOs) announced his retirement in December.

Will he resist the itch to come back, as Hagler did? Time will tell.

There are multiple paths linking the all-time greats, whose primes are separated by 40 years, but we found this five-boxer Fightline.

**Can you find a faster route?**

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage, the fights must come in chronological order. RING



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